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SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST

BY

ANNE BEALE

AUTHOR OF

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"ROSE MERVYN," "IDONEA,"
&c., &c.

"Truth, goodness, honour, harmony, and love,
The richest bounty of indulgent Heaven."
THOMSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG DALLIMORES.

'ANOTHER knock, I declare! I wonder who that is. Look, Quiz, but take care that nobody sees you,' cried Isabella Dallimore, as an echoing rat, tat, tat resounded through the house.

'It is a carriage and pair,' whispered Quiz, climbing on a chair in one of three windows, and glancing through a slit in a somewhat dirty white blind, which was drawn down.

'Sir John and Lady Roche have called to inquire, please, miss,' broke in a servant, who looked much as if she had just left her cooking.

'And what a figure you are, Drudge. You are never fit to be seen. Say we are all as well as can be expected,' replied Isabella, importantly.

Drudge disappeared with her message. Hers was no nickname, but had belonged to her family for many generations.

'We shall never get these frocks done in time, and uncle is to be buried on Friday. And now Lisle is beginning to cry. Just run and look after him, Helen. I am sure I shall be glad when mamma comes back, and I only hope uncle has left her a lot of money. I know she expects it, for she says she was his favourite niece,' poured forth Isabella.

'He was an old curmudgeon, papa

says so,' exclaimed Helen, leaving the room.

Isabella, Elizabeth or Quiz, and Helen were the daughters of Major Dallimore, and were, when thus introduced, seated round the dining-room table engaged in making mourning. They were superintended and aided by Miss Poore, milliner and dressmaker, who would much have preferred having the room to herself. The table, and, indeed, the apartment, was nearly covered with black, and the deceased uncle ought to have been satisfied could he but have been present at the mortuary display of his affectionate relatives. Nevertheless, the sun shone brightly through the closed blinds, and the young people were by no means unhappy.

Isabella, the eldest, was a tall, dark, angular girl, very decided in manner, and fully impressed with the importance of her

present position; for had she not been the one to be apprised of the death of their great-uncle, Squire Lisle, of Lisle Manor, the previous day, and to receive her mother's orders concerning the instantaneous purchase and manufacture of the mourning proper for so illustrious a relation? And had she not been left in charge of the house and family more than a week before, when her parents were summoned to Lisle Manor to see the last of the head of the race of Lisle? Her sisters were, for once, awed into submission to her orders, and, besides, somewhat troubled by that indescribable sense of fear which death inspires in the young. They were respectively fourteen, eleven, and ten years of age, and were all working with a will in the hasty manufacture of the new black frocks.

'Pray, don't bring Lisle in here, Helen,'

exclaimed Isabella, looking up from a skirt she was running, as Helen returned, carrying a one-year-old baby.

'Ann declares she can't nurse him and make the servants' mourning at the same time. She says she must have help,' returned Helen, setting her brother down upon the hearthrug.

He began to roar, which caused Isabella to throw down her work and snatch him up in her arms with a shake, and a 'Hold your tongue, or I'll whip you,' a threat which he neither understood nor attended to, for he only roared all the more lustily. Quiz, meanwhile, went to the sideboard, and returned with a piece of sugar, which took instantaneous effect, and Lisle grew as quiet as a lamb while sucking this sweet consolation. He was an ordinary infant, with chubby cheeks, round, blue eyes, sturdy limbs, and stentorian lungs; and,

although his advent had caused much rejoicing in a family where girls were in the majority, he was tyrannised over by his very slaves. It was from hand to hand with him, as it was from hand to mouth with his surroundings—for a major on half pay, with a wife whose dower was modest, finds it difficult to keep up a large establishment. Lisle's nurse, therefore, shared the honours of a maid-of-all-work with Drudge, and neither was contented with her position. But then few of our servitors are contented in these socialistic times. However, Lisle sucked his sugar and his thumb by turns on the hearthrug, and peace reigned while the needles sped rapidly through the black merinos.

As the afternoon advanced, the knocks at the front door were incessant; but strong-minded Isabella was not to be turned from her occupation by the frequent requests for

an interview of anxious friends. 'As well as can be expected,' was all the information she volunteered, while Quiz peeped through her loophole as the visitors arrived and withdrew, gravely announcing their names, under her breath, and curtly describing their dress. She could just spy the portico and a portion of the street from her point of observation, and the temptation to watch and report finally overcame her love of work, and she remained kneeling on the chair and surveying the comers.

'One would think that Uncle Lisle had been king or prime minister at least,' remarked Isabella. 'Here, Miss Poore, this is ready to be tried on. Quiz, just go and keep Lisle quiet while Helen's body is fitted.'

'Here come aunt and monsieur,' whispered Quiz. 'He! he! I can't help laughing.

She is picking her way across the street on the tips of her toes, and is dressed as fashionably as possible. Miss Poore, did you make that dress? And the three dogs are with them.'

'No, I did not, Miss Elizabeth, I am not smart enough for Madame d'Angère. She prefers Miss Honeybun,' said Miss Poore, indignantly.

'They are not mourning, if we are,' said Quiz, aggrieved. 'I'm sure monsieur's hair has just been curled, and aunt looks quite cheerful.'

'Quiz, it is very wrong of you to talk of such things at such a time,' broke in Helen, severely.

'I can't be sorry for a person I never saw,' pouted Quiz.

'But Isabella and I have seen him, and he was—' returned Helen, and paused, as the door opened, and a lady and gentle-

man entered, unannounced, followed by three small dogs.

'He was the most crotchety man imaginable, my dears, but highly aristocratic,' broke in the lady, who, flitting from one to another of the three girls, imprinted a kiss on both their cheeks; six kisses in all, as Quiz was wont to say. 'Now, my loves, tell me all about it,' she added, sitting down in a large easy-chair, arranging her skirts, and glancing nonchalantly from one to the other.

'Ha! here is my friend Lisle,' exclaimed Monsieur d'Angère, stooping over the baby, uplifting him, and placing him on his knee, as he seated himself in the opposite arm-chair.

The three dogs, a terrier, a mongrel, and a Blenheim, arranged themselves on the hearthrug, and were soon variously tormented by Quiz.

'There is nothing to tell, aunt,' said Isabella, glancing at Miss Poore, and stitching away. 'Mamma wrote to inform us of Uncle Lisle's death, which took place early yesterday morning, and to order me to get mourning at once, and have it made.'

'A great expense and trouble for your poor mother—and, indeed, for all our family. I should not have worn black, for it does not become me, only mon Alphonse thinks it proper, and I always wish to do what is right. You see, we offended Uncle Lisle when we married, and we don't expect a penny of his money. Your mother does, poor love! and so do the rest of our family—and with some reason, for they have done their best to please him.'

'A difficult occupation,' chuckled monsieur, dancing the baby on his knee, and

drawing a gold snuff-box from his waist-coat-pocket, which caused Lisle to cough and sneeze violently. 'He like not the snuff, mon chou,' he added, addressing his wife. 'He rub the knuckles into his poor eyes.'

'He will get used to it, mon ami, like the dogs,' she replied, amiably. 'They are all so fond of your uncle, girls—everybody is that knows him, and I am sure it is not surprising—so clever, so accomplished, so elegant. You should have seen him when we went to Paris, and how we were fêted—just as if we were a prince and princess. Oh! I shall never forget that day on the boulevard!—what boulevard was it, my friend? I might have been the empress herself.'

'Tell us about it, auntie,' cried Quiz, running to her aunt's side.

'Not on this occasion, ma mie,' inter-

rupted monsieur, imbibing the aromatic snuff in spite of Lisle, who was now occupied with a large bunch of seals that hung from his watch-chain.

'Another time, my loves,' said Madame d'Angère, moving her head with an attempt at melancholy, and spreading out her bonnet-strings. 'You understand, this is a mournful occasion. But, whenever I think of Uncle Lisle, I become severe on account of our dear cousin Lucy —you remember her, Miss Poore?'

'I should think I did, ma'am! She was a sweet young lady,' returned the mantua-maker. 'I'm sure I wish she had been spared.'

'Do tell us all about her, auntie!' cried Quiz; 'there is no harm in that, if there is in the boulevard.'

'Ha, ha! the boulevard! That was delightful! Lucy was my favourite cou-

sin, dears, and, as you know, Uncle Lisle's only daughter. But you have heard her story a hundred times. She went to school over the water, and managed to offend Uncle Lisle by marrying a poor lieutenant, and going to India, where they both died. But we all offended him. He has never invited me to the manor since I married your uncle—the most elegant of men; a chevalier and—*diplomé*, and—'

'A poor teacher of language,' interrupted monsieur, laughing, and dancing Lisle on his knee.

'We must try on the frocks, aunt,' said Isabella, at an appealing glance from Miss Poore.

'Do, love! I delight in seeing things tried on,' replied Madame d'Angère. 'Alphonse, we are in no hurry? We have nothing to do, I think?'

'Absolutely nothing, ma mie. The

days flow smoothly; and we do as we like since I have relinquished my professorship of language.'

'But we can't dress and undress before Monsieur d'Angère!' exclaimed Isabella, decidedly.

'Pardon! I go, and return for madame,' said that gentleman, rising hastily, and placing Lisle on the hearth-rug, who, however, was not to be so abandoned. He clung to the watch-chain, thereby endangering a remarkable gold repeater, which was the admiration of the children.

'I take him with me!' cried monsieur, rescuing his watch, and disappearing with the victorious baby, followed by the three dogs.

'That *is* a blessing!' remarked Isabella.

'He is the most amiable man in the world! I have never seen him out of temper. See how the dogs insist on

accompanying him. Let out Doux-doux and Frou-Frou, Quiz; Loulou must stay with me. Here, my treasure! — my beauty!' and the Blenheim leapt on his mistress's lap.

Thus the room was cleared for the fitting on of Helen and Quiz's bodies, and a long dissertation on dress followed between Madame d'Angère and Miss Poore. All this took much time, and, during the interval, bandboxes full of black hats arrived, which had also to be adjusted to the heads of the children. Madame d'Angère was convinced that one of them would suit her, and, taking off her bonnet, tried it on before the chimney-glass.

'It is too young for you, aunt,' said Isabella, stoutly. 'You would look like the old ewe in lamb's clothes.'

'I am sure she looks very pretty in it,' argued Helen. 'It becomes her fair hair.'

This was a soothing compliment after Isabella's rebuff, and Madame d'Angère settled to keep the hat, adding,

'And you shall trim it for me, Miss Poore, with a little crêpe, and a feather I have at home. After all, black is a change, and, as Helen says, becomes a blonde, as Alphonse always calls me. He admires fair ladies, he says, because the French are dark.'

Tea was announced, and Isabella hurried off to a small and somewhat untidy breakfast-room. Here she found monsieur and Lisle, happy as princes; and the former expressed himself quite willing to stay to tea, albeit tea was a beverage of which he never partook.

'Monsieur Lisle, he will drink mine,' he said; but Isabella carried Lisle off to his nurse, screaming his protest against removal.

When tea was over, Isabella proposed that her aunt should remain to help with the mourning, and monsieur took up a book and consoled himself in the breakfast-room. Time sped on with the busy needles, and evening and the lamp waned together, while madame talked incessantly.

Suddenly and unexpectedly a letter was brought by Drudge, and presented to Isabella.

'From mamma! How did it come?' she asked, laying down her work.

'The coachman from the manor brought it express, miss; he says he has galloped all the way, and was nearly thrown from his horse twice over.'

'Give him some supper, Drudge—ale, whatever there is. Make him as comfortable as possible.'

Drudge departed, and Isabella opened

her letter. She looked aghast as she read it. It was as follows :—

'Stop the mourning. Don't buy another yard, or put in another stitch. Send back everything. Don't spend a penny if you can help it. I will explain when I get home, after the funeral. Tell Miss Poore you will not want her again. Take care of yourselves and be economical. The will has not been read yet. Don't let this about the mourning transpire. In greatest haste, your affectionate mother.'

'I don't understand it, but mamma says we shall not want you any more, Miss Poore,' said Isabella, with her customary resolution, but with crestfallen countenance.

'Very well, Miss Dallimore,' replied Miss Poore, offended, rising and gathering up her implements, preparatory to taking leave.

The others were all alive with curiosity; but Isabella said no more until Miss Poore had departed. Then she read her missive aloud. The general consternation may be imagined, and culminated in the summons of Monsieur d'Angère.

'They have learnt probably that they are not mentioned in the testament,' he said, with an inward chuckle.

'But the will has not yet been read, Alphonse,' put in his wife. 'Fortunately the hats have not been purchased, and, after all, black does not really become me, does it, my Alphonse?'

'But we must pay for all that is cut out!' exclaimed poor Isabella. 'And the servants' gowns nearly made, and their disappointment!'

'And our nice frocks,' sighed the children.

'Let us hear what Ratigan has to say

about it. May Quiz call him in, Isabella?' asked madame.

No objection was made, and the coachman who brought the letter was summoned. When he appeared in the doorway, Madame d'Angère tripped up to him, and shaking hands with him, declared herself delighted to see him again. He was a stolid-looking old man, who stood with his right hand extended, as if in the act of driving, and the thumb of the left in the armhole of his coat.

'So your poor master is gone at last, Ratigan,' said madame. 'Do you know why you were sent over post-haste so late this evening?'

'I knows as the roads is very slippy, miss—ma'am, and that the servants' mourning is stopped. That's all I knows,' was the aggrieved reply. 'They do say as Dr. Foss come and stopped it. But

what right he have at the manor is unbeknown to me. I only wish as Miss Lucy had never left home; then, maybe, she'd be living now. But, to be sure, we're bound to submit to Providence, as Mr. Churchhouse was saying yesterday.'

'He did preach you a sermon, then?' asked monsieur. 'The homilies are good, if we have money or if we have none. I have many preach to me during my life. I hope yours was so good as mine.'

'Yes, sir; but I likes a fruitful sermon,' replied Ratigan, at which monsieur chuckled.

Little was extracted from the coachman, beyond the fact that his master, Squire Lisle, had refused to see any of his relatives except Mr. Churchhouse, who was his vicar as well as his nephew-in-law, and who was a good man. Nobody knew how he had left his money, but it was sup-

posed amongst his nieces. At the word 'nieces' the coachman paused, remembering to whom he was speaking, and that madame was probably not named in the will.

'Don't mind me, for I expect nothing, and shall not be disappointed,' said Madame d'Angère, with a lively air.

'The old gentleman had not too much love for me,' remarked her husband. 'Did he make a good death?'

'Well, sir, I shouldn't like to say,' replied Ratigan, gravely, and Monsieur d'Angère grew serious also.

It was truly a grave and serious question, and the children's inquisitive faces became solemn as it was propounded and answered.

The nieces alluded to were Mrs. Dallimore, Mrs. Churchhouse, wife of the vicar of Lisle, Mrs. Conquest, married to a

London barrister, and Madame d'Angère.

'I am sure I hope mamma will not be disappointed,' broke in, unexpectedly, the lively Quiz. 'She is always saying that, if she had only a little of Uncle Lisle's money, we could have new clothes, and dress as fashionably as auntie. She wonders how you manage to be so smart, auntie, since you are not very rich, after all.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed monsieur, 'the ladies, even the affectionate sisters, never understand one another when the toilette is in question. Madame has a perfect taste, Quiz, and Madame Dallimore cares not for outward appearance.'

'And a very good thing, too,' said Isabella, sturdily. 'It is better to have enough to eat than wear a satin gown. Quiz, I think it very improper to talk of anybody's expectations, just as Uncle Lisle is dead.'

'Perhaps, ladies, I had better return to the manor, if you have no particular orders,' put in the stolid Ratigan. 'Everybody will know the squire's intentions when the will is read, and Dr. Foss knows more than he tells. 'Tis mysterious about the mourning, but we must submit, though we was all looking for'ard to our new suits, 'specially the females. They was terrible took aback when they heered that they wasn't to have even so much as a black ribaud for their caps; and most of us expected hat-bands, as is but nat'ral. But without doubt the squire had his reasons. Good night, ladies; good night, sir.'

Ratigan went out as solemnly as he entered, one thumb in the arm-hole of his coat, and his right hand grasping an imaginary whip.

'Be sure you have some supper,' followed him from Isabella, who turned upon

Quiz as soon as the door was shut with, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Quiz, to speak of mamma's private concerns before servants.'

'Dey know them very well already, ma chère,' laughed monsieur. 'But I agree with Monsieur Ratigan that this command about the mourning is the oddest of all the squire's oddities.'

'It is very disappointing,' moaned Helen and Quiz simultaneously, and even the resolute Isabella could not deny that she felt much aggrieved.

CHAPTER II.

THE SQUIRE'S FUNERAL.

ON the day appointed for Squire Lisle's funeral, a woman and a little girl were walking along the country road that led to Lisle Manor. It was a mild day in winter, and the sun shone brightly on the downs that surrounded and almost enclosed the hamlet, fields, and numerous lanes and paths through and near which they sauntered. The woman seemed weary and silent, but the child chatted merrily as she went along; now pointing out one object, now another, or pausing to exam-

ine some stone, plant, or insect that attracted her attention. The word 'mamma' was frequently uttered in her innocent prattle, but her mother took no heed of it, and wandered on listlessly, without replying to the little girl, or even noticing her words or actions. Her face was wan and white, and there was a strange, vacant, far-away look in her dark eyes that betokened, if not exactly insanity, at least lack of intellect. An occasional movement of the hands, and muttered, scarcely audible words on the lips, also indicated the wandering mind. If she breathed a sound, the child was at once all attention, and 'Yes, mamma,' 'What, dear mamma?' welcomed it; while a pair of bright blue eyes were turned eagerly towards her, and two small, gloveless hands were laid on her arm. But she went on her way mechanically, while the little girl, who

seemed accustomed to her mood, was sometimes in advance of her, and sometimes in the rear; now talking to herself, or addressing the birds that twittered on the spray, or the animals that she spied through the gates, or gaps in the hedges. Sometimes she would bid her mother hearken to the bleat of the sheep, and this would take effect, and cause her to pause a moment in a curious, listening attitude, with eyes fixed on the smooth downs; but there was no perceptible interest. At last they reached a point where four roads met, and a cross was erected to indicate whither they tended.

Here the woman stopped to consult it, apparently, as to the route, while the child read out the names inscribed on its four directing arms.

'To Lisle. See how funnily the hand points, mamma,' she said, indicating the

outstretched finger of the hand painted on one of the four arms.

'Quick, Aveline,' cried the woman, hurrying on in the direction to which the 'To Lisle' branch pointed.

'Yes, dear mamma,' cried the child, dancing at her side.

But the mother's pace soon slackened into a dawdling gait, and the little girl again began to examine the objects by which they were surrounded.

The road was singularly solitary. Although they must have walked nearly two miles, they had not encountered a human being. At last, however, they reached a turning which led to a farm-house that lay nestled in a hollow not far off, and here were signs of life. One or two men were labouring in a field, and another was engaged in a sheepfold a few yards down the lane. The bleat of a lamb

attracted the child, who was led irresistibly to run a few paces towards the spot whence the sound came. She reached the fold where some of the early lambs were penned, with their mothers, and a cry of delight penetrated the still air from her clear young voice.

'Mamma! mamma! See the pretty lambs!' she shouted. 'Come here, my dear mamma!'

'Ay, they be fine and yearly, my little one,' said a man, who was engaged in putting turnips into the fold, where sheep and lambs were enclosed.

A shriek of 'Aveline' was the response she received from her mother, and she hurried after her. But her childish attention was soon caught by a cheerful whistle, and she perceived a horse and cart in advance of them, at the side of which a carter was walking slowly, ac-

companied by a dog as brisk as herself. She ran towards the dog, which jumped upon her, at which her mother exclaimed, 'Down, Frisk,' to her great delight.

'Do you know the dog, mamma?' she asked.

'His name bain't Frisk, but Toby,' explained the stolid youth who drove the cart.

'Nice Toby,' said the child, running after her mother, attended by the dog.

They suddenly found themselves at the summit of a short hill, the first symptom of rising ground they had met. On either side was a rocky bank overtopped with trees, which quite shut out the sight of the delightful downs, and seemed strangely gloomy after the bright open country through which they had passed. Heavy shadows from rocks and trees fell across

the road, and the darkness and loneliness oppressed the child. She stood a moment with her finger on her lip, as if afraid to descend the hill, and again Toby leaped upon her. The friendly act encouraged her, and she went to her mother, and took her hand, as if she fancied that she too might be troubled by the unexpected gloom. On the contrary, however, she began to run rapidly down the hill, dragging Aveline with her, and Toby followed, barking with glee. Before they reached the bottom, a little nest of thatched cottages was visible, surrounded by trees, and once more the sunny downs were in sight. The child's face expressed joy, and the mother's a change to something like intelligence, as they neared the pretty hamlet.

'There! there!' exclaimed the latter, pointing to a church tower which ap-

peared beyond the cottages, and was over-topped by trees.

'Yes, dear mamma. What is the name of the place?' asked the child, her sweet face eager with curiosity.

A smile was the only reply, and the gleam faded from the mother's dark eyes.

Still, a sort of instinct induced her to turn out of the country road, and to pass through a couple of open iron gates on the left. Here Aveline had amusement enough, for on either side of a broad drive were high shrubberies, amongst the thick leafage of which berries of red, white, and black shone, while the hardy laurustinus showed her white blossoms. Indeed, the mildness of weather and climate indicated autumn rather than winter, and the high walls of evergreens seemed impervious to atmospheric changes. Behind the said walls grew trees, which met in arches

above the avenue, but, being at that time nearly bare, they did not intercept the sunshine.

This bright and pleasant picture was suddenly darkened by a strange and melancholy scene—that is to say, if a simple funeral procession can be called melancholy or strange. The woman and little girl were met by six labourers, bearing a plain oaken coffin. No sign of mourning appeared, neither did sorrowing friends follow. The bearers wore the ordinary Sunday clothes of working men, and neither pall nor inscription covered or marked the coffin.

The woman stood aside to let the funeral pass, and the child shrank behind her, seizing her hand. But no sooner had it gone by than, as if by some impulse, they turned and followed, silent and unobserved, the woman pressing forward,

and plucking laurustinus blossoms as she went.

Was it a pauper's funeral, with its unadorned coffin, its mourningless bearers, and the shabby, drooping woman and child in its wake? So the spectator might suppose. Slowly and noiselessly they wound down the avenue and entered the village road. Although the church was close by, no bell was tolling, and, as they almost immediately reached the churchyard-gate, they were met by no person on the way. But within the gate a crowd had assembled, bare-headed and with awe-struck faces. No word was spoken, and, as the white-robed priest met the funeral and preceded it into the ancient church, the stillness seemed almost awful. But the spectators followed, and the sound of their footsteps relieved the oppressive calm, while the solemn voice of the clergy-

man was heard, repeating those blessed and hopeful words, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'

Instinctively, as it would seem, the mother and child went into a high pew, curtained and seated with faded crimson. Here the one stood and listened to the solemn service, while the other buried her face in the cushions in childish terror. It was curious to watch the tall, thin, drooping woman looking on with half inquisitive, half distraught eyes, and the so lately energetic child curled up on the seat, her feet on a high hassock, her head on the two little arms that she had laid beneath her face upon the crimson damask. The solemn service was read with devout feeling, and the rustic congregation listened with an awestruck wonder unusual in those so well-accustomed to watch brothers and sisters committed to the grave. When

the last impressive words of that most consolatory and hopeful fifteenth of Corinthians were read, and the bearers proceeded to uplift the coffin in order to carry it to the churchyard, the pale woman crept from the pew and followed with the rest, but the child did not move.

As the beautiful service was continued beside the open grave, the woman stood amongst the other spectators, not seeming to listen, but gazing on the gabled windows of the old manor-house in the distance. Her attention was recalled, however, by the sounds which commit 'dust to dust,' and she made her way through some of the bystanders, as if to see whence those sounds proceeded. The country folk were reverently casting earth upon the coffin, seeing which she threw in the bunch of laurustinus she had gathered from the shrubbery, and then withdrew,

uttering a strange, wailing cry. An old man took her by the arm and held her, looking at her with surprise.

'Who is buried?' she muttered, as if curiosity had recalled reason for the moment.

'Hush! Squire Lisle,' returned the old man, who held a Prayer Book in one hand.

She threw up her arms, and fell down upon the sward.

The man, who was both clerk and sexton, raised her, and drew her away from the grave. She had not fainted, and glanced round with a look of uncertain inquiry which was inexpressibly affecting.

When the service was concluded, the people still lingered, talking to one another in low, solemn voices. Even the clergyman remained, and, while he stood looking into the grave, the sexton pointed out to him the woman who had uttered

the cry he must have heard. They both approached her, and as they drew near she retreated with a frightened air.

'We will not hurt you,' said the clergyman, kindly, quickening his steps.

But she shrieked, turned, and fled. She ran through the churchyard, out by a small side-gate, into the little street of the hamlet, so swiftly that, had they attempted to follow her, they could not have overtaken her. They watched her so far, when a turning in the street hid her from sight.

'Who is she?' asked the clergyman.

'Nobody knows, sir; but I saw her drow vlowers upon the coffin,' said one.

'And I be sure she be stark, staring mad,' put in another. 'She was in the squire's pew all through the service, peeping and making grimaces at your worship and the coffin.'

'I zee her run down the lane wi' a little girl like mad, and turn up to the manor,' said the carter, already noticed, who had managed to be in time for the funeral.

'We be all mad,' remarked the sexton. 'I've been in this parish, man and boy, hard upon fourscore year; and I and my vather before me have a-dug every grave all that time, but I'll warrant me we never digged such a one as this 'ere. I little thought to a-zeen the day when a Lisle should be buried like a pauper, wi' nobody but a maniac to drow a vlower upon his coffin.'

'It is strange indeed, Biles! but it was the squire's will, and we are bound to attend to it,' replied the parson. 'Will some of you look after that poor woman, and bring her to the vicarage?'

'Yes, sir, I wull,' said the carter, whose name was Dan Lane; and who hastened

down the churchyard to the little street of the hamlet.

Parson and clerk returned to the grave, and while the one, in his capacity of sexton and gravedigger, began to shovel the earth down upon the coffin, the other looked on with a sober, perplexed, and melancholy air. He was Mr. Churchhouse, who had married a sister of Mrs. Dallimore, and was incumbent of the parish of Lisle. When, at last, he turned from the grave, with a sigh, the cottagers, who were still standing about, greeted him as he passed them with bows and curtseys; but it was evident that he was too much preoccupied to notice them. He walked quietly towards a private gate that led into the grounds belonging to the manor, and disappeared from the inquiring gaze of his parishioners.

A thick, high laurel-hedge flanked the

path he took, and, as he strolled slowly along, he ejaculated from time to time sentences such as these :

'It will create such a gossip. I fancied I was his confidant. Not a shred of black to be worn or displayed. I dread the reading of the will, and doubt not it will bear upon this fancy. Yet he was penitent and believing, and the rest matters little. I suppose they are all waiting for me. I must not delay.'

Mr. Churchhouse suddenly stopped, divested himself of his surplice, threw it across his arm, and hastened through a long line of shrubberies to a side door in the ancient manor of Lisle. Here he was met by Ratigan, the coachman.

'They are all waiting for you, sir,' said Ratigan, respectfully. 'Mr. Redfern told me, all in a fuss, that I had better inform you that they was all ready to read the

will. I said as I supposed you was pufforming the last offices, and he said, "Pshaw! what was there to pufform?" and I couldn't give a proper answer, seeing as there was nobody to follow the squire, and only old Biles to see after the remains. It is hard, sir, after forty years' service, not to be permitted to attend his funeral.'

Ratigan rubbed his sleeve across his eyes.

'It is hard, Ratigan, and quite incomprehensible,' returned Mr. Churchhouse, entering the manor, followed by the aggrieved coachman.

CHAPTER III.

AVELINE LEFT ALONE.

THE little Aveline slept long and soundly in the cushioned pew; she would have been left alone in the ancient church, but for the dog Toby. His master had, with natural curiosity, left his cart and horses to follow the funeral, and his canine friend, with equally natural curiosity, had peeped in and out of the different pews until he came upon the child who had noticed him so pleasantly. He was as tired as she was, and when he had sniffed and snuffed at the mouldy

old cushions, and stood upon his hind legs to look at her, he jumped upon the said cushion, turned round several times, as dogs will, and finally lay down, with his head towards hers, and composed himself to sleep.

The church in which they slept was so old that it was even said to have originated in Saxon days. If so, no traces of that early period remained; but a small Norman arch and windows in a state of decay betokened its rebuilding by those who succeeded the Saxon in the conquest of Britain. Squire Lisle had declined to aid in its restoration, saying that he liked the graceful aisles and arches and the worm-eaten carved woodwork because they were old, and did not desire to see them renewed in his day. He was, indeed, a stickler for all that was ancient, and had passed the last years of his life in his old

manor, surrounded by old furniture and old domestics, resolutely refusing to admit any new element.

Above the pew in which Aveline slept was a monumental brass recording the death of a Lisle in the sixteenth century, and all around her were antique, half-defaced tablets, interspersed with modern monuments. Indeed, to judge from these, the Lisles must have been a family as worthy as it was old, for their good deeds were chronicled both in Latin and ancient and modern English, until the beholder was astonished at the excellence of the race. Still the Jewish final clause was applicable here as in the Old Testament days—'He slept with his fathers,' for the last Lisle had just been interred where his ancestors slumbered till the 'final trump' should arouse them. Yet not actually in their sepulchre, since he had willed to lie

in the churchyard rather than in the mouldy vaults beneath the sacred building.

The church was damp and chill, despite an attempt at a fire kindled by the old sexton in the squire's honour in a hideous stove that defaced the aisle and pierced the wall, and a church-restorer would have been scandalised at much to which the congregation were indifferent. Still, the vicar had restoration at heart, and hoped the time would come when the 'old things should become new.' But Biles, the sexton, argued that what had been good enough for the squire and his father was good enough for him, and 'he hoped he shouldn't live to see the old church mauled about by them architects.'

It was dusk before he had finished heaping up the earth on the squire's grave. He had many visitors during this process, and they delayed him in his work.

They had all much to talk about.

'I wonder who will have the land and who the money?' said one.

'I shouldn't be surprised if the parson come in for a good slice; the squire was mighty fond of him. I hopes he will,' replies Biles, shovelling away. 'I suppose they'll put a fine marble moniment over the grave by-and-by. Go you, Thomas, and pick some laurel to stick about; I can't abear to think o' a Squire Lisle o' Lisle wi' nothing but the bare earth auver his head.'

A lad who was standing by ran to the thick laurel-hedge that divided the manor grounds from the churchyard, and soon returned with an armful of branches.

'There, that's as smooth and tidy as I can make it to-day,' remarked Biles, leaning on his spade and contemplating the spot beneath which lay the mortal remains

of him who had been to him as a sort of feudal prince. 'There baint much difference atween us now, squire!'

'I suppose they're reading of the will,' suggested one of the bystanders.

'They've a-read 'un by this time,' returned Biles, taking the laurel from Thomas' hands and sticking it in regular rows over the grave. 'Measter always let us have so much as we wanted to stick in the pews at Christmas, and sure he wouldn't begrudge us this!'

'Who'd a-thought it? The squire to a-come to this, and all of his own free will!' ejaculated an old woman, rubbing her hand across her eyes. 'He be right alongside o' Miss Cunninghame. Wull, hem might a-lay a-nigh a worse 'ooman. Why didn't 'ee toll the bell, Biles?'

'Mustn't,' said the aggrieved Biles—'not so much as threescore and thirteen

strokes to tell how old he war. But what's the odds?—we're all dust! There, now, I'll just go and shut up the church. I never thought to a-lived to see this day, though I'll al'ays maintain he was a grand gen'leman.'

The sexton hobbled away, leaving a little group behind him, and went into the church to extinguish the fire in the stove. On his way he passed the Lisle pew, and paused, muttering,

'Who'll sit here now, I wonder? 'Twas always empty enough wi' only the squire, now 'twill be emptier. Lawk a-mussy! what's this? Why, here's Dan Lane's dog, Toby, asleep wi' a gurl beside un.'

He went into the pew. The last rays of a winter sunset were glinting feebly through the small Norman window above the brazen tablet, and fell on the rosy

cheek of the little girl, Aveline, still fast asleep.

'Bless her little heart! who be she?' muttered Biles, stooping over Aveline, which caused Toby to jump up with a bark that aroused her.

'Yes, dear mamma!' she murmured, as if answering some question, as she opened her eyes, and met those of the astonished sexton. 'Mamma! where are you, dear mamma?' she added, starting up.

'Who be 'ee, little un?' asked Biles.

'Where is my mamma?' returned the terrified Aveline, seizing the sexton's hand.

She got up and looked about her. The blue eyes fell on nothing but the roof and arches of the old church. She glanced appealingly from Biles to Toby, then seemed about to leave the pew.

'Come along o' me, I'll find her,' said

the sexton, and she put her hand confidingly in his.

They left the church together, followed by the dog. In the churchyard they were met by Dan Lane, the carter.

'Oh, my! Here you be, then, after all, Measter Toby, and here's the little gurl, as sure as I'm alive. I was coming to tell Mr. Churchhouse as I can't find her mother nowheres,' he said.

Aveline, who was looking on all sides, cried out at these words and let go the sexton's hand. But she soon recovered herself.

'Mamma will come back and fetch me,' she said. 'She always remembers where she left me;' and she ran off towards the church.

The old sexton hobbled after her, while Dan, whistling to his dog, went in search of the vicar.

Aveline made her way to the crimson-curtained pew, where Biles joined her.

'You can stop there while I put out the fire,' he whispered, looking into the child's anxious face.

'She is sure to come back,' she said, confidently, and climbed up on the seat to watch the door, while Biles went to extinguish the already nearly dead embers of the stove.

This done, he returned to Aveline.

'Now, my purty, you must come along o' me. I must lock up, and it's a-nigh dark.'

'May I see if she's hid away first?' she asked.

The old man, willing to satisfy her, led her round the church, and it was not until they had peered into the pews, and glanced behind the pillars, that she consented to leave it.

'I will stop here in the porch till she comes back,' she said, shivering slightly, as the big key turned in the chancel door.

'But I'm bound to lock up the gate too,' argued Biles, pointing to the bars which enclosed the porch, and therewith the stock of coals for the consumption of the stove.

'Then I'll stop outside. Mamma's sure to come and fetch me,' was the reply.

The sexton was at his wit's end. The child planted herself against the iron gate as soon as it was locked, and appeared to have made up her mind to remain. There was an expression of resolution in the sweet rosy face that Biles, who had had much experience in children and grandchildren, was inclined to call obstinacy.

'You can't bide here all night, you knows,' he said, severely, trying to pull her away.

'Only till mamma comes back. She will soon be here,' she replied, tears springing to her eyes.

At this juncture Dan and Toby re-appeared, and the latter frisked round Aveline, who seemed very glad to see him.

'Can't see the vicar nohows. They be a-reading o' the wull,' whispered Dan to Biles.

'Musn't leave her here all night, whether the mother comes back or no,' returned the puzzled sexton, rubbing his grey head.

'I'm not afraid if Toby may stay with me,' said quick-eared Aveline. 'He likes me because I love dogs.'

At this moment another dog appeared on the scene, a retriever, that growled at Toby. He was followed by a youth, at whose advent the men touched their hats.

'Here be a little gurl, Measter Leonard, and we don't know what to do with her,' said Biles. 'If you could just ask the vicar, now!'

Leonard went up to Aveline, and, stooping over her, inquired kindly what she was doing there. Both were nearly invisible for the obscurity. She returned the accustomed answer—that she was waiting for her mamma. The poor child was now the centre of a little group, for some of the villagers, seeing that something unusual was going on, had come to learn what was happening. One woman affirmed that she had seen Aveline's mother run like mad through the village; another, that she took the turn up to the downs, and Dan was convinced that she had run away for good. At this Aveline began to cry.

'If you will come with me, I will ask my uncle to find your mother,' said Leonard,

who was an orphan nephew of the vicar.

'Mamma will only come here,' sobbed the child. 'I won't go away, or I shall lose her.'

Saying this, she clung to the bars of the porch-gate. While this was passing, a gentleman and lady came through the shrubbery entrance, from the manor to the church, and walked arm-in-arm down the churchyard path. Seeing the little crowd they paused to inquire, and soon learned what had happened.

'Bring the child to the vicarage,' said the gentleman.

'She will not come,' replied Leonard; then added to Aveline: 'I will wait here all night till your mother comes, and bring her to you.'

'So wull I,' added Dan, stoutly.

The moon rose behind the downs, as if

to enlighten the obscurity of the scene, and revealed the terrified face of the forsaken little one, as she looked from one to another of those who surrounded her. Mrs. Churchhouse approached her, and asked her whence she came, whither she was going, and one or two other questions, to which she received no answer but sobs.

'You must come with me,' said the vicar, decidedly, trying to unclasp the little hands which clung to the bars.

'I shall lose my mamma. She will not know where to find me,' shrieked the child, holding fast by the gate.

But he succeeded, with difficulty, in disengaging her hands, and removing her from the church-porch into the path. She struggled and cried, but more with grief than passion. Again the two youths

assured her that they would watch for her mother, upon which she broke from the vicar and threw her arms round the knees of his nephew, with the words,

'Let me stay with you. Mamma runs away from strangers.'

'You must trust to us to do what is best for your mother, child,' said the vicar; 'but you cannot remain in this place all night. To-morrow we will do our utmost to restore you to her.'

Either the decided manner or the words awed the child, and she yielded. Still clinging to Leonard, she allowed herself to be half carried through the churchyard, sobbing violently, and followed by the little crowd—all save Dan, who, true to his word, remained to watch for her mother.

'What shall we do with her? We have

already had bother enough for one day, and I am tired to death,' said Mrs. Churchhouse to her husband.

'We must put her up somewhere. Too late for the Union,' was the reply. 'Take her to my study, Leonard.'

The youth led her through the moonlit shrubs, up the gravelled walk, to the peaceful vicarage. He was in advance of the others, so he opened the door, crossed a comfortable hall, and went into his uncle's study. Here was a good fire, towards which he gently impelled Aveline. But she was sobbing and trembling so violently that he looked anxiously towards the door, which he had left ajar, in the hope that they would be quickly followed by his uncle and aunt. But they did not appear.

This youth's name was Leonard Leigh, and he had lived many years at the vicar-

age of Lisle. He was, indeed, dependent on his uncle, who had taken him to his home on the death of his widowed mother, the vicar's only sister. He was sixteen years of age, and so manly-looking that strangers reckoned him at least two years older. As he lifted the sobbing child into his uncle's easy-chair and stood beside her, hesitating what to do next, the firelight fell on a face that was not only handsome, but intelligent. The quick, dark eyes betokened resolution, the working brows and mouth sympathy, the forehead intellect.

'I wish you wouldn't sob so,' he said at last, kneeling down before Aveline and taking her little hands. 'It's no good, you know, and will not bring your mother back.'

'She went away before—and—and—I couldn't find her for ever so long,' sobbed the child.

'But she came back at last. I will bring her to you to-morrow, if Dan Lane and Toby don't find her to-night,' said Leonard. 'She cannot have left the island at this hour, and it is even too late for the coach. Some one is sure to have taken her in.'

'Quite sure?' asked the child, starting up and fixing her streaming blue eyes on his.

'Quite sure,' he replied, confidently. 'Where did you come from? and how did you get here?'

'From Bristol—in the train first—then in a big steamer—then in a coach—and then we walked ever so far through the pretty fields and lanes, till we saw that boy and Toby, and the funeral, and the church—and—and—I fell asleep—and—poor mamma went away. Oh, if I hadn't gone to sleep!'

She began to sob again.

'Now, if you cry, I shall never be able to find her,' exclaimed Leonard, knitting his brows. 'Have you had any tea?'

Aveline shook her head, and made a great effort at composure. He got her to promise not to stir till he came back, and left her to go in search of food. Alone, she gave vent to her grief, and the words, 'Mamma! dear mamma! where are you?' sounded through the quiet library. Another friend arose in the shape of the large retriever that had previously growled at Toby. Dogs ever sympathise with the grief of childhood. He put one big paw upon her lap, and looked inquiringly into her face. She was frightened for a moment, but soon placed her small hand on his head and stroked it. At this, another paw was laid on her lap, and he rubbed his cold nose against her face. Then she

twined her arms round his neck and abandoned herself to her sorrow, pouring out her griefs to this new friend with childish simplicity.

'If I had not fallen asleep with Toby,' she sobbed, 'she would not have left me. Will that big boy find her for me? They will shut her up again if I am away. I wonder where I am.'

She looked round the comfortable library, and, as if frightened by its size and the approaching twilight, hid her face in the dog's shaggy neck. He licked her pretty arm, and sought, with canine sympathy, to soothe her grief. But still she sobbed on, and awoke the quiet library at intervals by her pathetic cry, 'Mamma, mamma!'

CHAPTER IV.

THE WILL.

WHEN Leonard left Aveline, he crossed the hall to the drawing-room, where he found his uncle and aunt and their daughters in grave discussion.

'May that little girl have some tea, aunt?' he asked, abruptly, thinking only of Aveline.

'Pray don't interrupt us, Leonard,' replied Mrs. Churchhouse, peevishly. 'Tell Gentle to see to her. Your uncle is always burdening us with strays, and I have had enough worry for one day.'

'Remain with her till I come,' said Mr. Churchhouse, who was accustomed to command and be obeyed, both in his parsonage and parish.

'I hope something will turn up for Leonard soon. I am sure we shall not now be able to support him much longer,' said Mrs. Churchhouse, as Leonard disappeared.

She emphasised the *now* in a way that was quite comprehensible by her family, for at that moment they were discussing her uncle's will. She and her husband had just returned from the reading of it, and were neither of them in the best of humours. The daughters, who were young and inquisitive, were anxious to learn what would be their own peculiar increase of income, and whether Uncle Lisle had left them anything.

'Not a penny, girls, not a penny. Not

so much as a five-pound note to buy a mourning ring,' said their much-aggrieved mother. 'Mourning-ring, indeed! why, he ordered that no one, not even his valet, should wear black for him. I am sure I was always very fond of him, in a way, and did my very best to please him.'

'We all did that except Amicia,' remarked Mr. Churchhouse, who, though annoyed, was amused at the disappointment of his family, 'and I think she and her husband will be as much surprised at their thousand-pound legacy as we all are, for they certainly did not expect it.'

'But, papa, surely you have something. He thought so much of you. Did he forget you too?' asked Lucy, a lively girl of sixteen, who was seated on a low stool by the fire near her father, while Mrs. Churchhouse and the eldest daughter,

Sophy, were side by side on a neighbouring couch.

'By no means,' replied the vicar, lugubriously. 'I am that bugbear, residuary legatee, and, not having enough on my hands already, have the honour to be a sort of co-guardian with the Court of Chancery of that fortunate individual, the heir-at-law.'

'Who is that? Not Leonard! Although he was so fond of him, he surely wouldn't have left the manor out of the family,' cried the two girls, simultaneously.

'No. All the jealousy lavished upon *my* nephew was utterly thrown away. He still keeps his birthright of poverty. But Uncle Lisle did not quite forget him. With grim irony he left him his old davenport, saying in his will that he believed he was the only person alive who would value it.'

'I am sure I should not,' exclaimed

Sophy, aggrieved. 'A rickety, lumbering old thing.'

'But Leonard will—he likes relics,' put in Lucy. 'Only I wish he had been left money instead. Dear papa, do tell us who the heir really is? If it isn't mamma, it must either be Aunt Dallimore or Aunt Conquest, since you say he has left Aunt Amicia a thousand pounds. That is just what I expected to have.'

'"He that expecteth nothing will not be disappointed," and frequently agreeably surprised,' said the vicar. 'It is certainly true in this case.'

'Mamma, who is it? Papa is so provoking!' asked Lucy.

'Master Lisle Dallimore Lisle!' returned her father, slowly, taking the words from the lips of his wife.

The girls threw up their hands in astonishment, exclaiming,

'That baby!'

'That baby!' repeated their father. 'And now, if you will hold your tongues, I will tell you all about it.'

'And I will go and take off my things, for I am tired to death, and quite unnerved,' said Mrs. Churchhouse, rising, and moving towards the door with melancholy face and drooping figure.

'Poor mamma! It is too bad,' cried Lucy.

'To begin at the beginning,' commenced Mr. Churchhouse, 'Uncle Lisle left a particular paper with Dr. Foss, to be opened the day after his death. This contained the singular orders relative to his funeral. He desired that no one should wear any sort of mourning garment, hatband, scarf, or other funereal accompaniment for him, and that he should be buried in the churchyard beneath the east window. The

grave happens to be near that of his former housekeeper, Miss Cunninghame. He was to be borne thither by six of his labourers. They were to be dressed in their ordinary Sunday clothes, and to wear nothing black. His coffin was to be of oak, without the usual plate and pall. This will account to you for the sudden orders that the mourning clothes should not be made. According to your aunt Dallimore, her girls were already busy over theirs; but, fortunately, our distance from town saved us the expense. Not that I should have minded that, for I would much rather have spent a small income than that the whole Lisle family should be subject to the gossip of the island; besides, I really liked Uncle Lisle, in spite of his reserve and pride, and I fancied he liked me.'

'So did we, I'm sure,' moaned Sophy.

'His will was certainly his greatest oddity,' continued her father. 'We all suspected that he wished the manor to go in the male line, and we knew that he was annoyed at the nearest of kin being females; but we little thought that he would constitute your Aunt Dallimore's youngest child heir of all. Don't interrupt. He has left him everything save a few legacies. The child had never offended him, says the will—for he had never seen him; and aunt Amicia and her Frenchman had never curried favour. So this is how the rest of us are rewarded for our disinterested civilities. The manor is to be let, and all the money is to accumulate until Master Lisle is twenty-one when he will come into a fine fortune, if he live. Of course he is to take the name of Lisle as his surname, and will therefore be favoured with duplicates of that ancient

family distinctive. The possibility of his death is not contemplated; so, should he die before attaining his majority, I suppose litigation would ensue. But I hope he may thrive well, and prove a blessing to the church and parish.'

'I suppose Aunt Dallimore is delighted?' said Lucy.

'As much so as propriety will permit,' replied the vicar. 'Of course she wipes her eyes, as we all do; but hers is what is vulgarly called a "wet grief" that can afford to show itself. Ours is dry. She and the major started off as soon as the will was read, not liking, your mother supposes, to meet our disappointed faces. It is difficult to imagine the results of such a will, which is, perhaps, scarcely just. As its predecessors have been destroyed, we can never know how the squire disposed of the property before the birth

of a boy into the family enabled him to act as he has done. Why he was so morose and peculiar, we cannot tell, though he had reason to regret his unforgiving conduct to his only daughter. His co-heiresses may have overdone him with letters and slippers, but they never actually offended him. Still, ever since we have been in the parish, I have felt sure that some secret sorrow or remorse weighed him down. However, I have reason to believe that at last he was a sincere penitent and believer, and that he died in the certain hope of pardon through the atonement of our Lord. But I must see after that poor child.'

So saying, Mr. Churchhouse left the room, and went to his library. Here he found Aveline and his nephew in grave discourse. Leonard had asked the serv-

ants to give him some tea and bread-and-butter, which he had himself taken to her. He found her, as we left her, with her arms round the retriever's neck. He prevailed on her with difficulty to eat and drink, and by degrees soothed her into comparative calm. When Mr. Churchhouse appeared, she began to sob again; but Leonard whispered that, if she were not quiet, he would not help to find her mother; and she restrained herself.

Mr. Churchhouse was a kind-hearted man, of hasty temperament. His quick nature was reflected in his face and voice, and a stranger was apt to be angered by his manner. But those who knew him well understood that his 'bark was worse than his bite,' and that underneath an almost despotic government lay a very soft throne. He was about to check Ave-

line very severely, when his nephew appeased him by assuring him that she had 'promised to be a good girl.'

'If I find mamma. If not, I can't help crying,' whispered the child.

Mr. Churchhouse soon learnt all that she had confided to Leonard, after which he sat down by the fire, and began to question her himself. His manner soon ceased to terrify her, though it was evident that there was something she was afraid to tell. But by degrees she became more communicative, and the innocent truthfulness of childhood prevailed over the dread of she knew not what.

'You say that your mother went away from you before. How did that happen?' asked Mr. Churchhouse.

'They took her away,' was the reply.

'They? Who? What had she done?'

'Nothing.'

'Try to remember. If you tell the truth, we shall then know better what to do to find her.'

'Papa said she was mad.'

'You have a father, then? What is his name? Where is he?'

'Captain Roone. He is dead, and buried in the sea.'

'Did you love him? Was he good to your mother?'

She shook her head, and hid her pretty face.

'Did they say your poor mother was out of her mind, my child, and place her in an asylum?'

'Yes—I think so.'

Here the little creature began to sob, and Leonard crept towards her, and took her hand in his. He knew that his uncle, being a magistrate, understood how to

arrive at truth, and he feared what his next question might be.

'But she came back to you again, dear,' proceeded the vicar, kindly, 'and I have no doubt we shall see her here to-morrow. I understand now that she was terrified by the funeral, and by my approaching her. Did she often run away?'

'Only when papa was cross.'

'Ah! poor things! Where did your papa and you live?'

'He lived on the sea in his vessel almost always; we lived at the places his ship came to.'

'You are quite sure he is dead?'

'Yes. His brig went down to the bottom of the sea in a great storm ever so far away.'

'Do you remember where you lived last?'

'Number 9, Dock Villas, Bristol.'

'Do you know why you came here?'

'I think mamma wanted to hide from those men who used to fetch her away. Oh, sir! will you let me go and look for her? Perhaps she will be lost.'

The child sprang from her chair as if in terror at some remembrance. Mr. Churchhouse drew her kindly towards him, put his arm round her, and assured her that search was being made, and that she must be in the island.

'Was your mother in the habit of talking to you of the Isle of Wight?' he asked.

'I don't remember. She used to tell me stories of when she was in school, and I liked to hear them. But she has not told me any for a long, long time.'

'How old are you?'

'Eight. I was eight last October.'

'Had you many friends in Bristol?'

'No; dear mamma was afraid of everyone but Betsy and me. She thought they would take her away. But she was always quiet with us, and she was very fond of Betsy. Oh! my dear, dear mamma!'

Aveline withdrew from Mr. Churchhouse, covered her face with her hands, and tried hard to stifle the tears and sobs that were again beginning.

'What can we do with the child?' muttered the vicar. 'Leonard, just ask Gentle to come here.'

Leonard obeyed, and soon returned with the housemaid, having told her the state of the case on the way. Her master bade her see that the little girl was taken care of, and that she was properly housed for the night. Gentle, who had been many years in the family, and 'knew their ways,' as she phrased it, made no demur, and was about to lead Aveline away, but the

child clung to Leonard, and, with a sharp cry, entreated him to go with her to look for her mother.

'He must remain with me,' said Mr. Churchhouse, decidedly. 'In this house young people do as they are bid.'

'But I will seek for your mother as soon as I have done what my uncle wants, and I will come back and tell you if I find her,' said Leonard, as resolutely as the vicar.

Aveline glanced from one to the other, and then at Gentle, who was a prim, discreet serving-woman of the old school, with a real cap on her head, and a genuine white apron over her gown. She made no further resistance, but allowed herself to be led from the library by this Abigail, still sobbing silently, 'Mamma! dear mamma!'

They were joined in the hall by Lucy, who had heard the cry, and whose kind

heart had already gone forth to the child for whom Leonard had pleaded.

'Give her to me, Gentle,' she said, taking the little girl's hand. 'I will see to her while you answer mother's bell.'

The said bell was ringing violently, and Gentle ran upstairs, while Lucy led Aveline into a small sitting-room appropriated to her and her sister. Here she listened patiently to her sad story, and petted and fondled her, as young girls can, and bade her trust her father and Leonard, who would be sure to find her mother. Then she took her up to her own bed-room and showed her pictures and told her stories, until tired nature yielded, and she fell asleep in Lucy's arms. She undressed her gently and laid her in her own bed.

'Sophy will not mind,' she murmured, as she stooped over the poor child and kissed her sweet face. 'How lovely she

is! She is like the dawn, with her flushed cheeks and golden hair.'

The sisters shared the same room, but had separate beds, and, when Sophy appeared, she demurred at first at the intrusion, but relented when she saw the pretty face, with a tear, even in sleep, stealing through the long eyelashes.

'What will papa do with her?' asked Sophy.

'He cannot afford to adopt her now that Uncle Lisle has disinherited us all,' replied Lucy. 'What an iniquitous will! I wonder what Leonard will do with the davenport?'

The girls laughed softly as they stood on either side of the bed, still looking at Aveline. As if in response, a smile dimpled the child's pretty face, and they simultaneously stooped over it and kissed the round, pink cheek.

'Perhaps there will be a lot of money in the crazy old drawers,' whispered Sophy.

'I hope there may, for Leonard is heartily tired of dependence, and I don't wonder; for mamma does not fail to remind him of it,' said Lucy. 'Good night, you darling,' and, with another kiss, Aveline was left to slumber alone.

CHAPTER V.

LEONARD'S LEGACY.

WHEN Mr. Churchhouse and his nephew were left alone, the former took a small packet from his pocket. It was in the form of a letter, but tied with green tape and sealed with a large red seal. Holding it in his hand, he carefully locked the door.

'Uncle Lisle asked me to give you this myself,' he said. 'He requested that no one else should be present, and that the transaction should be private between you and me. Of course the wish of the dying

is sacred, and I shall never mention this letter to anyone, unless it should, at any future time, be your and my duty so to do.'

He placed the document in Leonard's hands, who turned it over with surprise and curiosity. On it was written, 'For Leonard Leigh alone—to be given to him by Mr. Churchhouse after my decease.'

'The poor squire! It was good of him to think of me. It feels like a bunch of keys,' said Leonard.

'Yes. Probably the keys of the old davenport he has left you,' replied the vicar.

And so it proved.

'The keys of Worsley Lisle's davenport, which is to be opened by Leonard Leigh only, and in private. He is to allow no one but himself to pry into it, and to keep its contents secret. He will find therein

no personal good, for Worsley Lisle believes it is better for him to hew out his own way in the world than to have one cleared for him. But he may, with his indomitable will, find something for the good of others, and, if so, he will do his duty more courageously for them than the testator has done his.'

This was written on parchment, and enclosed with the keys, in the sealed envelope. Leonard stood some time turning over and considering the papers and the keys. To one of the latter was fastened an ivory label, inscribed with the word 'Drawers,' and the twain were united by a piece of dirty tape.

'Very mysterious!' he muttered at last. 'But I am not forbidden to show you this, uncle,' he said at last, placing the parchment in the vicar's hands, whose colour rose as he perused it.

'He trusts you more than me,' he said, annoyed.

'Because, as yet, I have not a wife and daughters, uncle,' laughed Leonard. 'The squire always said that he would never confide a secret to a married man, because he was sure to tell it to his wife, and she to somebody else, and so on.'

'You seem to have been much in his confidence, sir,' remarked the vicar, angrily.

'This is the first secret with which he has entrusted me, and it must be the last. When shall I have the davenport, uncle?'

'All in due course, I suppose. You have heard how he has left his property?'

'No, but I am very curious to learn.'

Then Mr. Churchhouse gave Leonard the history of the will, which did not appear to surprise that youth so much as it had done his aunt and cousins.

'Lisle is a jolly little fellow. How grand the Dallimores will be!' he exclaimed. 'Why, De Fortibus will lord it over us all more than ever.'

'Why do you call Isabella by that name?' asked the vicar. 'You had better not let her hear you.'

'You know, uncle,' replied Leonard, deprecatingly, 'that Isabella de Fortibus was lady paramount of the island, which is just what Isabella Dallimore would like to be. You must admit she is very overbearing, and all the boys call her De Fortibus. It is not my fault.'

'But I have no doubt you encourage them in it.'

As Leonard could not deny this, he changed the subject by inquiring as to what legacies the squire had left. To tell the truth, he chafed inwardly at having himself nothing but the old davenport, for

one and another had been buoying him up with the hope of at least a thousand pounds to help him up the ladder of life.

'Annuities and legacies to the two or three servants who have been with him longest,' returned Mr. Churchhouse. 'Forty pounds a year to Ratigan, and he deserves it, for he has put up with more than most men, and a legacy of twenty pounds to old Biles to see that no monument is erected to his memory, either over his grave or in the church.'

A rattling at the handle of the library door, and a repeated knocking, here interrupted the conversation. It was Lucy, with the announcement that tea, or rather supper, was ready, and that everybody was waiting.

'Coming directly!' shouted her father.

'I will stow away the keys, and then go

and inquire if that poor woman has turned up,' said Leonard.

Each did accordingly. The latter ran up to his bed-room, and groped his way in the moonlight to a desk placed on a chest of drawers, the key of which was in his pocket. He carefully locked the davenport keys into the desk, and then paused to consider what he should do with the desk-key.

'If I should lose it, or if anyone should purloin it, I shall be in a fine muddle,' he ruminated. 'So much for the acquisition of property! I must now stow away this key where nobody can find it. This will do. No one will open this old book which the squire gave me.'

He took down the 'Pictorial History of the Isle of Wight' from a well-filled shelf, and placed the key between its fly-leaf

and cover, saying that he would get Lucy to make him a chain on the morrow, to which he would append it; then he stood a few moments to look out of his window on the downs that lay soft and sleepy beneath the moonlight.

'What if she should have drowned herself, and that pretty child be an orphan like me?' he muttered, with a shudder. 'How could one eat and drink while there is such uncertainty?'

He hastened downstairs, paused a moment to listen to the clatter of voices and plates in the dining-room, and was about to open the front door when his cousin Lucy appeared.

'Leonard, I have been looking for you everywhere. Mamma says you are always late. Do come to tea.'

'Tell aunt I will be back directly. I am only going to inquire if the poor wo-

man is found. And, Lucy, just see after the child who is consigned to Gentle's tender mercies. She is a paragon of womankind, but didn't look pleased at the honour uncle thrust upon her.'

'I have seen the child; she is asleep.'

'Thank you, Lucy. I will soon be back. Make my peace with aunt.'

With this he left the house, pulling the door to noiselessly behind him.

He ran down the road to the small hamlet that lay nestled in the hollow below church, parsonage, manor, and downs. The lights twinkled cheerfully through each casement, and an odour of peace seemed to enwrap the thatch-covered cottages. He entered one of them. It was where Dan Lane lived, whose father was smoking his pipe, while the mother and various children were sitting about at work or play. He inquired for Dan, and

was told that he had gone off after some mad woman who had run away and left her child behind her.

'Just as if there warn't children enough already,' added Dan's father, looking ruefully at his brood.

Leonard proceeded to the sexton's cottage, where he found old Biles ruminating over his fire, while his aged wife was preparing his supper. The sexton greeted his visitor warmly, but could give him no information concerning Aveline's mother.

'I see her run wild down the road,' explained Mrs. Biles, pausing in her frying operations to turn and face Leonard, fork in hand. 'I be a-getting a bit o' pig's-fry for my old man, Measter Leonard. He did come in that shivery from burying the squire, you med a-knocked 'im auver wi' a cullender.'

'Buried like a pauper alongside of his

housekeeper!' exclaimed Biles, uplifting his hands. 'I al'ays said as he wur fond o' Miss Cunninghame. When she wur Madam Lisle's lady's-maid she wur a rare beauty, and held her head as high as her missus. And she wur a sight more pleasant than Madam Lisle. 'Twur queer she should a-come back here to die, and lie alongside of her measter. But dust to dust, bone to bone, as I says. Still he were Squire Lisle o' Lisle. I hope they'll put un up a grand moniment.'

'Then you haven't heard, Biles, that you are to have twenty pounds to see that no stone of any kind shall mark his grave?' said Leonard.

The old man and his wife turned suddenly round, the latter nearly upsetting the frying-pan. It was some time before they could be made to understand the nature of Mr. Lisle's bequest.

'The Lord bless un!' ejaculated Mrs. Biles, with uplifted hands.

'I'd rather a-buried un in church wi' his vorevathers, than had the money,' said Biles. 'But a testament's sacred, an' no stone shall lie aneär his grave so long as Joe Biles be clerk an' sexton o' Lisle parish. Nor his housekeeper's neither, for that much. I'll zow grass-zeed, and plant two zypresses, and carry off every pebble as zure as I be Joe Biles.'

Here Dan Lane looked in, and told Leonard that a woman had been seen wandering up the downs, upon which the two lads left the sexton's cottage together in pursuit of Mrs. Roone, and hurried through the hamlet, and up the lane until they reached the stile that led to the downs, and finally their summit.

They knew every inch of them, and Leonard especially was acquainted with

all the points of historical, geological, or antiquarian notoriety that lay between the manor and the sea on one side, and the manor and the county town on the other. They explored the latter route, because Dan had been told that the woman's steps had been turned that way. They sped over the dewy turf in the moonlight, glancing hither and thither, and, with youthful trustfulness, expecting to find her they sought. They were from time to time encouraged in their hopes; for Leonard picked up a handkerchief at one point, and Dan a fragment of fringe off a thorny fence at another; while they fancied they could occasionally discern footprints on the dewy sod.

For once Leonard forgot to glance from the downs at the moonlit waters of the Solent, or to pause to search for Roman remains where he knew they lay buried.

Although it was winter, the night was warm, and the sleeping downs looked solemnly sweet beneath the lights and shadows that floated over them from moon and clouds, and the valley below them seemed strangely mysterious in the solemnity of night.

Still the youths sped on, until they found, at last, the object of their search. Leonard uttered an ejaculation of thankfulness, as he suddenly perceived a recumbent figure beneath a large furze-bush. He ran towards it, and recognized the pale face of Aveline's mother. He stooped over her, to see if she were alive or dead, and found that she breathed, and slept. Dan stood at a distance, fearful that they had come upon a corpse. The moon, now high in the heavens, looked down pitifully upon the sleeper,

and touched the wan cheeks with her silvery rays.

Leonard feared to rouse her, lest she should again escape; so he knelt down beside her, and, motioning Dan to be ready, raised her so gently that she did not immediately awake. They lifted her from the ground between them, and, in so doing, her torn mantle fell off, and she uttered a little cry. Leonard fancied he heard the word Aveline. He bade Dan aid him in lifting the poor woman, but Dan's fingers were not so tender as his heart; and, by the time they had managed to place her on her feet, she was quite aroused. As her garments were saturated with the dews from the skies, and her limbs stiffened by the chill of earth, her instantaneous effort to escape from their grasp was ineffectual, and she

raised a pitiful wail as she struggled to release herself from their hold. Leonard spoke kindly to her, but she evidently did not understand him. He could only make out a few words of her disconnected lamentations. The principal idea in her mind seemed to be that she must escape from something; and, 'not to prison. Save me. Oh! save me,' was audible amidst her incoherent cries.

The two youths had left the village of Lisle several miles behind them, so Leonard felt assured that it would be useless to think of retracing their steps. He was quick of thought and rapid of decision; so he resolved to take her to another hamlet that lay beneath the down where they found her. It was a difficult task; for the path was steep and slippery, the moonlight uncertain, and the poor creature refractory. Her cries went

to Leonard's heart; still he and Dan held her fast, and supported her between them until they finally reached the rough fence and stile which led out of the downs into the roads that debouched variously from the slumbering village. Here a policeman walked his dreary rounds, and looked about for law-breakers, who rarely appeared.

This functionary met our trio at the stile aforesaid. He had noted something unusual moving on the downs above him, and had patiently awaited its descent. Leonard soon made himself known, and informed the policeman of the state of the case, in whispers that his charge could scarcely overhear. After some consultation, and with much difficulty, they induced the unfortunate woman to accompany them to a small inn, the host of which was well-known to Leonard. They

knocked him up, and his wife soon accommodated the weary wanderer; while Leonard resolved to remain in the parlour for the remainder of the night, first bidding Dan return to Lisle with the news.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOUSE OF INDUSTRY.

IT came to pass, in the natural course of events, that the poor unknown wanderer, Mrs. Roone and her child Aveline, were conveyed to the great Union Workhouse, or House of Industry, as it was called, at Parkhurst. We will pass over the terror of the one at the sight of the parochial authorities that sent her thither, and the joy of the other at the prospect of seeing her mother again. Suffice it to say that Mr. Churchhouse took the little girl himself, and Leonard

accompanied her mother. The milk of human kindness flowed freely in our island, and everyone concerned was desirous to do what was best and most rightful for both. Sympathy is more spontaneous and universal than we fancy, and there was no member of the family at Lisle Vicarage that would not have done all in their power to help the strangers to their home and friends. But it was deemed wisest that the inquiries should be made systematically, and that, pending these, the poor daft woman and her innocent little girl should be lodged where they would be properly cared for, and where they had a claim for consideration, instead of with people, however kind, who knew not what best to do with them.

Naturally these measures displeased Leonard, who, in his youthful enthusiasm, would have had them lodged in the

empty manor, or anywhere but the workhouse. Still this large asylum for the destitute was not to be despised. Seated on a hill on the outskirts of Parkhurst Forest, surrounded by green fields and cheerful roads, blown upon by genial breezes from down and sea, and consisting of airy, roomy apartments, the huge building, capable of holding seven hundred people, was, on the whole, rather cheery than melancholy to look at. Some discontented persons chose to consider it a jail; but, when compared with its neighbour, the big convict prison, it looked more like a palace. And certainly, if only for change of air, the 'casual' visitor must be benefited by a sojourn in this healthy spot, the selection of which, for the maintenance of the poor generally, proves that their richer brethren have no desire to wash their hands of them, since

the charming site tends to longevity. The sound of the bugle and military movements, as heard from the neighbouring Parkhurst barracks, must also be somewhat inspiriting, and help to break the monotony of the industrial or suffering day. A strange and interesting triad are these three great national institutions on the summit of that breezy hill, and close to that ancient forest. Barracks, workhouse, prison—how suggestive! Each with its chaplain, its surgeon, its hospital, and the whole trio covering an area of a hundred acres, and surrounded by forest land.

When Mr. Churchhouse and Aveline drove through the great iron gates and up the road, the child, who had grown communicative, asked many questions, and seemed delighted with the cheerful aspect of the exterior of the union.

'Shall I soon see my dear mamma?' she inquired. 'And will they let me stay with her?'

'I hope so, my child,' was the evasive reply.

Mr. Churchhouse was a magistrate, a guardian, and a general benefactor of the poor; but he was too well acquainted with the rules of the establishment to answer with certainty. A man in fustian, who was working in the garden, hastened to hold his horse; the porter admitted him with alacrity, for he was a favourite, despite his somewhat choleric disposition, for everyone knew that he would literally sell the coat off his back to help a distressed brother.

Aveline grasped his hand tightly as they passed through the great dining-hall, one hundred and eighteen feet long, and wondered if her 'dear mamma' had been in

that formidable place; but she saw little more of the interior of the building at that time, because Mr. Churchhouse led her at once to the board-room, where two gentlemen awaited him. After a short, whispered conference, he again took her hand, and, preceded by one of these, proceeded to another private room, where, to her great joy, she saw her mother. Heedless of the presence of the matron, Leonard, and two or three others, she ran towards her and threw her arms round her, with her usual pathetic cry of, 'My dear mamma, I have found you!' But she met with no response. Her poor mother either did not recognise her at all, or was so occupied by her surroundings that she took no heed of her. She was clinging to Leonard when her child greeted her, and she clung to him still, casting alarmed glances on the rest of the little party.

'I fear it is a bad case. She does not know her child,' said one of these, the doctor, to Mr. Churchhouse.

'She will—she will by-and-by. She is frightened,' cried Aveline, facing the speaker, all timidity gone.

'You need not fear—he is very kind—we are all friends,' whispered Leonard, equally to mother and child.

But they did fear, for they had been subjected to similar inquisitions before. Although kindly hands had ministered to them, they looked wayworn and sad enough, their shabby garments hanging limply about their limbs, and their hair being rumpled and tangled, in truly æsthetic fashion. Yet there was something in their appearance and manners which betokened a condition at least above the common. All present pitied them.

'It is useless to prolong this scene,'

said the doctor, taking Mr. Churchhouse aside. 'She is evidently out of her mind. I have already examined her, and find that she is also ill, which may act upon her nervous system. She had better be sent to the infirmary pending inquiries, and you must prevail on the superintendent to let her little girl go with her. She understands her. You have already questioned her?'

'Yes, and I believe I know all she knows,' replied the vicar. 'There is information enough to find her friends, if she have any.'

The doctor motioned to the matron, who, after receiving his orders, went quietly up to Mrs. Roone, and asked if she would come with her. But the poor woman only waved her off, and clung to Leonard. In spite of his true-hearted manliness, he was at a loss what to do,

and began almost to wish that he had slept in his own bed the previous night; still he would not give in, but said, bravely,

'Leave her to me, doctor. Show us the way, and we will follow;' then to Mrs. Roone, with decision, 'Now, you must come with Aveline and me.'

She obeyed him meekly.

'I always said you were born to command, Leonard,' laughed the doctor, leading the way. 'Pity the squire hadn't made you his heir instead of that baby. We should all have had to knock under then.'

'I should have been a greater burden than I am now, doctor,' returned Leonard. 'Now I am only an encumbrance; then I should have been an innovator.'

'Well put. Whatever is, is right,' was the reply.

To reach the infirmary they had to pass through the garden, which even at that wintry time was not bereft of flowers, carefully nourished and tended by inmates of the house. The sight gave evident pleasure to the poor patient, who smiled, and stretched her hand involuntarily towards a rosebud that still lingered on a nearly leafless bush.

'May she have it? It will do her good,' said Aveline.

The kind doctor plucked that 'last rose of winter,' and placed it in the child's hand. She instantly transferred it to her mother, across whose features flitted a gleam of intelligence, and the dear name 'Aveline' fluttered on her lips.

'Yes, my own mamma,' exclaimed the child, and the mother took her hand naturally.

The doctor slipped behind Leonard, and

whispered in his ear, 'There is reason left. Leave her while it remains, and she is satisfied with the child.'

Leonard obeyed, and felt almost annoyed that, when he released himself from her whom he had been supporting, he was not even missed. She was, as the doctor said, satisfied with her little girl. Still he could not refrain from following to the infirmary, inside which he had never been. He went with his uncle into the superintendent's neat sitting-room, while the doctor took his charge elsewhere, and, after waiting there some time, had the somewhat disappointing satisfaction of learning from the doctor that Mrs. Roone was quietly submitting to rules.

'She, her child, and a nurse can be in an ante-room, and not in the general ward, till we know where to send her,' he said. 'As they are your protégées, you may

just glance in upon them, Leonard.'

He did so, and saw the poor soul seated by the fire, scenting her rose, while a nurse and Aveline were taking off her bonnet and jacket. Beyond, through an open door, he perceived the general convalescent ward, with its clean beds and various female patients, who, for the most part, liked to come over to the infirmary from the sick-wards of the larger establishment. While the doctor was within, he continued to peep through the opening which he had purposely left him, and was perceived by Aveline. She ran towards him.

'Dear mamma is quite well again now,' she said. 'They are so kind. She is not a bit frightened. There are no policemen or officers here, only good nurses. She knows me, and they won't shut her up. Thank you and the kind

gentleman, and the ladies, and everybody. See, she is looking for me! She misses me! Good-bye. Good-bye.'

She held her pretty face, radiant with hope, up to Leonard, and he stooped and kissed her. He felt like a brother to this little girl whom he had aided, and, when she ran back to her mother, he was sorry to think that circumstances might prevent their ever meeting again.

'The first act is over. Let the curtain fall,' said his uncle, with a sigh of relief, when he rejoined him. 'Oh! this perplexing problem of what to do with the waifs and strays of life. Now, Leonard, come and drive me home, and we will look in on the Dallimores on our way, and see if they bear their honours meekly.'

Leonard liked being charioteer; indeed, he liked everything that gave him the mastery; and that, from no desire to

surpass his fellows, but from an inherent wish to excel in whatever he undertook. Ambition is of two degrees—the high and the low. The former is comprehended in that incomprehensible word, *Excelsior;* the latter in the comprehensible one, *vain-glory.* The one would mount, helping rivals up the steep—the other would push on, keeping them back.

Leonard worked for work's sake; struggled from mere vigour of mind and body; helped others from the promptings of conscience. He was almost indifferent to applause, yet morbidly sensitive of rebuke. Because he was an orphan and dependent, he was always fancying himself 'an obstructive,' and, while pining for love, feared that nobody loved him. But he was ambitious, and was not content with carrying off the prizes at the grammar-school where he was educated,

and winning champion cups at athletic sports, boating, and what not. He wished to go in for the higher prizes of life. But how? This was the problem he was always striving to solve.

As he drove through the clean, bright streets of the ancient and picturesque borough of Newport, and passed the quaint and antiquated grammar-school, he sought, for the hundredth time, to read his riddle.

'My holidays are over next week, uncle. I shall be seventeen before next term ends —and what am I to do after that?'

'After that! The deluge, I should imagine; for nothing mundane seems to offer,' replied Mr. Churchhouse. 'I had hoped the squire would leave you at least a thousand pounds, to give you a start; to article you to Mr. Redfern, or apprentice you to Dr. Foss, or even send you

to college, where you would be pretty sure of a scholarship. Now there seems nothing for it but to prepare for the Civil Service, or get a clerkship in the National Provincial, or——'

The third proposition remained unpropounded, for at that moment Leonard pulled up before the stone porch of Major Dallimore's broad-faced and comfortable-looking house. The major chanced to be lounging about outside, and came to welcome them with alacrity. He was a tall, large, broad-shouldered man of about fifty-five, who had nothing to do but to go shopping for his wife, and to obey, as in duty bound, the slightest behest of that admirable helpmeet; to make puns and jokes with everybody he met, and to spoil his children when Mrs. Major Dallimore was out of the way. That lady made a great point of the 'Mrs. Major,' because,

she said, 'the Mrs. Dallimores were legion, her husband being one of a numerous family.'

'Very glad to see you. Was wanting to talk over this wonderful will,' began the major, rubbing his hands. Put up the mare at "The Bugle," Leonard, and come back, and take pot-luck with us—not "dat excellent pote-look" which the Frenchman waited for till the meal was over—but Irish-stew, or some such thing.'

Leonard obeyed, and, when he returned, he was met in the hall by Isabella, who had the now all-important Lisle in her arms. Although he called her, 'De Fortibus,' he had a certain amount of sympathy with her, because she was independent, and disliked 'humbug,' as she phrased it.

'Come in here, Leonard,' she said, leading the way into the breakfast-room. 'Do

you believe that the squire was in his right mind when he made that will? If I were aunts, I would dispute it. Of course we have the best of it. But here is this baby—Lisle, you mustn't suck your thumb, now you are heir to all that wealth —this infant, who has to wait twenty years before anyone will be the better for the manor.'

'Excuse me, Isabella,' broke in Leonard. 'Chancery is sure to allow a good sum for his maintenance.'

'A fig for chancery. I don't believe in chancery, and everybody knows that what gets in there never comes out. But there is one comfort. We are to have a grand nurse to superintend this youth's nursery —don't suck your thumb, child!—a new housemaid, so that Drudge may the better attend to his food—a family doctor, for we already find that he is delicate, though

he never ailed in his life, and—I foresee that *my* authority will be set at nought.'

'Poor Isabella!' ejaculated Leonard, maliciously. 'But now you can go to Girton, since you will no longer be wanted at home.'

'We shall see about that,' returned the girl, loftily.

'Isabella! Isabella! where on earth are you? Where is that precious baby?' resounded through the house.

In another instant Mrs. Major Dallimore appeared. She was exceedingly short-sighted, and, as she wore her glasses dangling from her neck, they were never on her nose at the right minute, so she always appeared to be searching for somebody or something. She was careless as to dress, thus forming a contrast to her sister, Madame d'Angère, and on the present occasion

wore no cap, and was adorned by one of Isabella's lawn-tennis aprons, which was too small for her. Leonard did not like her, and was wont to say that she always came up to him 'butting like a bull.' She did so on the present occasion, as soon as she had taken the baby from Isabella. She had a grudge against him because she considered that he should have been placed in some orphanage, instead of with her 'poor, delicate sister.'

'How d'ye do, Leonard? So Uncle Lisle left you his old davenport? What on earth can you do with it, since you will naturally go out into the world soon? It is a lumbering, old-fashioned piece of furniture that no one would care to have in their house.'

'Not for the squire's sake, Mrs. Dallimore? Why, I would rather have it than a new one, because I have so often seen

him writing at it,' returned Leonard, sarcastically.

'Oh, to be sure! And Lisle would not value it, never having personally known his uncle, who still chose to make him his heir. I declare he is going to cry. The precious is ill. You must go to dinner without me. Tell papa I will come directly. It is three o'clock; but everything has been upset by this remarkable will.'

The young people went to the dining-room, where the family were assembled for dinner. They were soon seated, and all ate with fine appetite; for, when the major carved, he gave double rations, oblivious of the weekly bills. But his wife soon came in, having hushed the heir to sleep. The conversation turned wholly on the will, and it was very evident that, strive as they would to appear

humble, the Dallimores were much exalted by the disposition of the property.

Leonard was seated between Helen and Quiz, who confided to him their disappointment when the orders came to stop the mourning, and the latter, who was his favourite, said that 'Miss Poore had been offended ever since.'

'It seems to me that everyone is offended except Lisle,' said Leonard.

'Not papa and mamma—they are delighted,' whispered Quiz. 'And so are we, because we shall be ever so rich, and have new frocks and new furniture, and all sorts of things, when the Lord Chancellor has settled Lisle's salary.'

Leonard laughed, and thought, after all, that it was a pleasant thing to be heir-at-law.

Meanwhile the elders of the family party were discussing the will for the hundredth

time. Mrs. Dallimore was never tired of trying to explain that she had nothing to do with it.

'I am sure no one was so much surprised as I was,' she said, looking at Mr. Churchhouse through her glasses. 'My sisters are justly aggrieved, and almost reproach me for Lisle's good fortune—not Amicia, of course, for she expected nothing.'

'And got something,' put in the vicar. 'Bad plan to look for anything in this world. Once or twice in my life I have been led to expect legacies, and in each instance was disappointed. This had nothing to do with the squire, from whom we one and all looked for untold benefits, but from parishioners who promised me, one his arm-chair, another his Bible, a third as good as a hundred pounds. They all died without wills. Now Lisle and Leonard are heirs beyond dispute.'

'Poor Leonard!' ejaculated Mrs. Dallimore, turning towards him. 'What will you do with that crazy old davenport? I remember aunt seated in state at it years ago; and then uncle taking to it, nobody knew why.'

'It will hold my MSS. when I get it,' replied Leonard, with a side glance at Isabella.

'Such stuff!' said that young lady.

'I'm sure I wish the squire had left you something to start you in life,' said Mrs. Dallimore, condescendingly.

'He'll start himself, mamma,' put in impertinent Quiz. 'Won't you, Leonard?'

'I'll try, Quiz,' he replied.

'There's no space here for much of a run,' interposed the major. 'Emigration's the thing now-a-days. All England's overstocked. Bad enough when I went to India—worse now.'

Again the conversation turned upon the will, and Mrs. Dallimore renewed her excuses, until dinner was over, and Mr. Churchhouse and Leonard departed for the scene of the squire's eccentricities.

CHAPTER VII.

BOTH ORPHANS.

THE time-honoured grammar-school to which Leonard Leigh was indebted for his education was founded by Lord Chief Justice Fleming in the beginning of the seventeenth century. He had been sent to it as a weekly boarder from the age of ten years, and had profited well by its teaching. In spite of numerous escapades, a high spirit, and indomitable will, he had earned the good opinion of his masters, and was a favourite with his schoolfellows. They all looked upon him

as a sort of champion scholar and athlete, and were, on the whole, proud of him. Still nobody guessed what he would do with his gifts, mental and corporeal, because all knew that he was a penniless orphan, dependent on an uncle, who possessed little or nothing beyond his church preferment. Happily for him, however, there lay beneath the varied strata of his character that best of all gifts, faith. He trusted implicitly, with the trust of a child, in Him who is the Father of the fatherless, and, often to the displeasure of his friends, appeared careless of his future.

Leonard always thought of his schoolhouse with particular interest, because in it Charles I. had dwelt during his abode in Newport, while the negotiation between him and his parliament proceeded. Often, during the hours of study, he would conjure up the faces of the ill-fated monarch

and such church dignitaries as were with him, while divine service was performed in the very school-room in which he and his companions studied, and would be lost in a tender pity for one who had subsequently been imprisoned in the neighbouring castle of Carisbrooke. Indeed, the castle itself was a place of intense interest to him, and he delighted to roam amongst its ruins.

Monsieur and Madame d'Angère lived in the village of Carisbrooke, and would now and then invite him to stay with them from Saturday till Monday, an event which happened some weeks after that parting with the little Aveline which we have recorded. On the Sunday morning he prevailed on his host and hostess to go to church at Newport instead of Carisbrooke, because he loved the service at the beautiful church of St. Thomas, being

usually condemned to what he considered the dreary routine of ancient Lisle. He had, moreover, other reasons for wishing to worship there on that particular morning. While the organ was pealing forth its grand tones, his eyes wandered, as they always did, towards that sweet mural marble erected by Queen Victoria to the memory of the Princess Elizabeth, daughter of the unfortunate Charles I.; and he thought he would have fought to the death for the Stuarts, were their cause right or wrong, because they were unfortunate. He had often stood to gaze on the recumbent figure of the princess, as she lay with clasped hands, and her head on the open Bible, within the broken bars of her prison room, and he had wished that he were Baron Marochetti to have carved such a memorial. And how he had desired to emulate him, Albert the good,

who had caused two stained glass windows to cast a mellowed light on the sweet marble effigy of this daughter of a discrowned king! Very pitiful it was to him, even after the lapse of centuries, to reflect on this young princess, whose simple coffin had been found beneath that very church when it was re-built, not so many years ago.

From the monument there was but a glance to the altar. Here his eyes rested while the organ still played on, for here sat the children of the Blue School, in whom he took an interest. They were usually first at church, and Monsieur d'Angère was never long after them. He was a methodical man, and liked to set a good example in the matter of regularity. Thus Leonard had time to look about him before the service began, and to glance from the inanimate marble, past

the torn regimental colours, to the animate girls who were seated with their backs to the communion-table.

His school was called a *free* grammar-school, and educated some twenty boys of the town without charge ; and here was another free school for twenty of the other sex. It had this advantage over the boys, its girls were clothed as well as educated. And how picturesque their dress was! They all wore large gipsy straw hats, surrounded by a band of red ribbon, white caps, white bibbed aprons, long mittens, dark-blue serge frocks, and short cloaks. Their hair was smoothly brushed, Madonna-wise, and they all looked much as if they had suddenly started out of the canvass of some mediæval picture. Their conduct in church was so exemplary that Leonard was wont to wonder how they could be so well trained. As they sat on

the steps with their backs to the rails, they were visible in their old-world costume to most of the congregation. To the twenty town girls a few boarders were added, and a good work was accomplished in training them either for domestic service or apprentices.

On this particular Sunday, one of these little girls seemed unusually restless, and Leonard noticed that there was movement among the generally prim and sedate young people; but he was too far off to distinguish individuals. The congregation was large, the service impressive, the music good, and to him there was everything to please. And something also, in spite of his best efforts, to amuse. It was impossible for him to sit near monsieur and madame without feeling his risible faculties stirred within him. No one in the large church repeated the responses so

loudly as Monsieur d'Angère, and his foreign accent and nasal enunciation—the latter due more to snuff than consonants —were remarkable. Then his wife was in such a constant flutter of excitement over her flowers and bonnet-strings, that it was difficult to be as devout as could be wished near them. Monsieur d'Angère was a very religious man, and, being somewhat proud of his English and his voice, joined in all the responses. Although he sang French well, he occasionally stumbled over the English chants and hymns, and this it was that troubled the devotions of the junior members of the congregation.

'Listen to Monsieur d'Angère! How divinely he sings! Why does not everyone join as he does?' his admiring wife whispered to Leonard, when a well-produced note rose high above those of neighbouring vocalists.

Leonard had as much as he could do to keep his countenance; for, what between watching the Blue girls, still strangely moving in front, and receiving monsieur's quavers into his ears at the side, he was unusually inattentive. This was not natural to him, for he possessed a reverent and religious mind; so pulling himself up, and abstracting himself from outward things, he fastened his eyes on his Prayer Book, and sought to prevent his thoughts from wandering away from the spiritual liturgy of the church he loved. Conservative in most things, he desired no change in what he was pleased to consider as perfect as any compilation from Holy Scripture.

When the service was over, it took the large congregation some time to disperse; and he again found himself admiring the light and graceful windows, particularly

the one in memory of the soldiers who fell in the Crimean War, and who were formerly stationed at Parkhurst barracks; the old monuments and the curious carving on pulpit and reading-desk; for he never wearied of what pleased his eye and touched his heart.

It was not until the last note of the grand organ ceased, that he and his friends reached the outside of the handsome church. Here they were met by the Dallimores.

'Where is your mother, Isabella?' asked Madame d'Angère.

'She is stopping at home with Lisle. He has something the matter with him,' replied Isabella.

'Ah! mon ami Lisle! I am sorry. The great heirs are sure to ail,' put in Monsieur d'Angère, with a side glance at Leonard.

He was engaged with Quiz, when all of a sudden one of the Blue School children came breathless towards him, and seized him by the hand.

'They have taken away my dear mamma. Where have they put her?' she cried, in an eager, tearful voice.

It was the child Aveline.

She was succeeded the next minute by the mistress of the school, from whom she had escaped. She had recognized Leonard when in church, which had been the cause of the movement among the children. The mistress apologised kindly for her, saying that she had only been at school a few days, and was very unhappy about her mother. She then tried to induce her to accompany her, but the child clung to Leonard.

'Poor little girl! What is the matter?' asked Helen, compassionately.

'A disobedient child, who was naughty in church,' said Isabella.

'I only wanted to come to Mr. Leonard, because I have lost my mamma,' said Aveline, tears pouring down her face, as she looked from one to the other.

'I will bring her home directly,' whispered Leonard to the mistress. 'She knows me, and thinks I can restore her poor mother to her. I will be with you in time for dinner, if you will excuse me for half an hour,' he added to Madame d'Angère.

As they were attracting attention, and the rest of the Blue girls were waiting, he did not stay to explain matters, but went off down the High Street, holding Aveline's hand, and watched by the group of friends.

'Mais, what a beauty! Who is it?' asked Monsieur d'Angère.

'The child of the poor mad woman who ran away from the workhouse rather than be sent to the county asylum over the water,' replied Major Dallimore.

Monsieur shrugged his shoulders pitifully.

'I was once almost fou myself from poverty, in the time of my misfortune. Had they been so cruel to your pauvre Alphonse, mon amie, I would not have had my present happy condition,' he said, bowing elaborately to his wife, who responded with a graceful bend.

'But you are a gentleman, monsieur, and she is only a workhouse girl,' put in Quiz, who was watching Leonard and Aveline jealously.

The streets were full of respectable church and chapel-goers, some wending their way homewards, others towards the fashionable mall, for a few turns in the

delightful sunshine. Nothing could be brighter, more cheerful, more unpretentious than the crowds. Here and there a red-coat from the barracks enlivened the scene, and everywhere the brick houses and yellow, sandy roads glowed beneath a sky as clear on that winter's day as if it had been summer.

Leonard hurried through the streets as quickly as he could, dragging the little girl with him. As he knew almost everyone he passed, he nodded or spoke hastily as he went along, not wishing to answer inquiries concerning his charge. He reached the school-house before the mistress and her little train of picturesque scholars. It was a low, dark, old-fashioned building, with a tablet over its door inscribed with the date and particulars of its foundation, and situated in a quiet, retired street. Here Leonard began to

question Aveline, who clasped his hand in both hers, and looked round with evident terror.

'Why are you so frightened? Are they not kind to you?' he asked.

'Yes, they are kind to me; but my dear mamma, where have they taken her?' replied the child.

As she spoke, the mistress arrived with the other children, and they all entered the school-house together. She told the children to go into their large school-room on the right of the passage, while she spoke to Leonard in her parlour on its left; but Aveline still clung to him.

'You shall see Master Leigh again, my dear, when I have spoken to him,' said the kind governess, and she let go his hand submissively, and went into the school-room.

'I do not know what to do with her,

sir,' said the mistress, when she had closed the door. 'She has more than once tried to run away, and all I can say to her only makes her more miserable. She is far beyond her years in her learning, and has been taught the rudiments of French and music. She is very well behaved, or would be, but for this grief, and does everything I tell her.'

It was difficult to say which looked most puzzled, the good mistress or Leonard. Both were anxious to comfort Aveline, but scarcely knew how.

'I believe it was quite by favour that my uncle got her into the school,' said Leonard. 'You know that her poor mother escaped from the workhouse one night, and has not since been heard of. It was supposed that she discovered the intention of the guardians to send her to an asylum, of which her child says she

had a great dread. But she cannot be traced; neither can her friends. All they have found out is that her husband's name was Roone, and that he and the ship of which he was captain went to the bottom of the sea together.'

'The little girl says her mother was not mad, only "sorry," as she expresses it,' remarked the mistress.

'I do not think she was actually mad; neither does Dr. Foss,' returned Leonard. 'But she was next door to it, and driven into the melancholy, silent state in which she was found by ill-treatment, and by being placed in an asylum, it is supposed, when she was only at a low ebb of body and mind.'

'It was strange the vacancy in the boarders should have happened just now,' said the mistress. 'Squire Lisle was such a patron of the school that Mr. Church-

house got the presentation as his executor. But she is sure to run away, poor dear. I will bring her to you, sir, if I may. She seems to cling to you, and, when I tell her you are a young gentleman, she only says, "But he has promised to find my mamma."'

When the child entered, her first words were, 'Take me to my dear mamma;' but, when the mistress left the room, Leonard sought to pacify her, by saying, gently,

'I cannot take you to her at present. But I will tell you what I will do. If you will stay quietly here and try to be good and obedient, I will inquire about your mother, and bring you word. You could be of no use to her now, because she did not know you when you were at Parkhurst.'

'But she would soon! she would soon!'

cried the child, bursting into passionate sobbing.

Leonard drew her towards him: put his arm round her: tried to comfort her: in vain.

'I am told that she may get quite well, and then she would be sure to come back for you,' he said, persuasively. 'How nice it would be, if, when she has recovered and rejoins you, she should find you a clever girl, able to wait upon her, and cook for her, and do for her all that you will learn to do in this good school.'

'So it would,' she cried, starting back, and fixing her streaming eyes upon him.

'Then, if you will strive to do this, I will try to learn where she is, and how she is getting on, and tell you.'

'How soon? She will die—I shall die, if it is not very, very soon.'

'Listen, Aveline. It is our Father in Heaven who settles our life and death. He has taken away both my parents: taken them to Himself.'

'But He has drowned my bad papa in the sea, and made my good mamma run away for fear.'

'Still you may meet her again in this world. You have something to live for. I can never see mine again here below.'

'Poor boy! poor boy!'

Leonard had succeeded in turning the child's thoughts from her own bereavements to his, and she laid her hand on his shoulder and fixed her eyes, full of sympathy, on his face, which was, for the moment, troubled. It was a charming countenance that looked at him from out that prim little cap and quaint gipsy bonnet. He thought she was like a sweet rosebud tipped with dew.

'I will try to be good like you,' she said, after a pause. 'I will learn to clean the house, and make the beds, and lay the cloth, and cook, and do plain needle-work, and knitting, like the other little girls. And then, will you find my dear mamma?'

'I will try, indeed I will,' replied Leonard. 'Shall I tell the kind mistress this?'

'Yes. But must I always wear this funny dress? My dear mamma will not know me when she comes back. She used to know me sometimes in my own frock and hat.'

'We will manage that when we find her.'

Leonard opened the door, and led her into the passage. The mistress was waiting in the opposite room, surrounded by her little flock, now ready for dinner, and wearing white caps instead of

bonnets. All had their eyes fixed on the parlour door with natural curiosity.

'I will try to be good and not cry after my dear mamma all day long,' said Aveline, suppressing a sob, as the mistress came forward.

'That is right, my dear,' said that good woman, stooping over the child and kissing her.

'You will come and tell me soon—very soon?' were the pathetic words that followed Leonard, as he left the school-house, and hurried through the streets of the town to the delightful village of Carisbrooke.

CHAPTER VIII.

FONTAINEBLEAU VILLA.

LEONARD was breathless when he reached his goal. He had literally scampered over the mall, through the new village, and up the hill. Fontainebleau was the name given by Monsieur d'Augère to the cottage in which he lived, in memory of the place of his birth. For some time this word had greatly puzzled the post-man and tradesmen, but they had finally anglicized both it and the patronymic of its tenants by calling them *Fountainblu* and *Anger*, which distressed madame, who considered it hard that 'the most amiable

man in the world' should have so fierce a misnomer. Indeed, the villagers were wont to affirm that he was the meekest of Frenchmen, and was never known to be *angry* with anyone.

The cottage was scarcely visible from the road, owing to the shrubs that surrounded it, but a small swing gate and a short path led at once to its verandah. It was built chiefly of wood, and covered with smooth thatch, which some people affirmed to be more picturesque than waterproof, but which its tenants greatly admired. Its frontage faced a lawny field, backed by high and umbrageous trees, which, although no appendage to Fontainebleau, Monsieur d'Angère was pleased to call his plaisance. It might be more truthful to say that he thus denominated his cottage, its tiny garden, and general surroundings.

Leonard was greeted by the words, uttered in the shrillest of voices, 'Trop tard, le diner est servi,' and the still shriller barking of the three small dogs; this while he was yet in the miniature hall.

'I am so sorry to be late, but I could not help it,' he apologised, as he entered the pretty drawing-room at the back.

Monsieur d'Angère was standing before a cage, gesticulating and exclaiming, 'Silence, Jacquot!—hold your tongue, Polly!' while a grey parrot was screeching out all sorts of sentences, half French, half English, in which the word dinner predominated. His wife sat on a couch, beating her foot impatiently, and contemplating her small Geneva watch.

'Ha! here you are, mon ami Léonard! Now we shall all be content. My wife, she like the punctuality, and I—why, ma

foi, I care not much, provide I satisfy my hunger at the end.'

'You know he is the most punctual of men, Leonard, and likes his meals to the minute—you know you do, Alphonse,' said Madame d'Angère, kissing her hand to her husband, and leading the way to the small dining-room below.

'I know quite well, Aunt Amicia. I am so sorry to have kept you,' said Leonard, hastening to perform a little ceremonial that was expected of him—that of offering his arm to Madame d'Angère.

'Excuse me, mon cher, but we have proceeded together so many years,' cried monsieur, passing before him, and presenting his arm, which was taken with inimitable grace.

Leonard smiled as he followed them down a staircase that could only conveniently accommodate one at a time; for,

though he really loved them next to his uncle, he could but be amused with them. Pat, pat, pat, came twelve little paws at his back, while 'Bon appétit! make haste Lilyvite!' from the parrot, wound up the procession. Lilywhite was the maid-of-all-work, once a Blue School girl, who was being trained by Madame d'Angère for 'higher wages and bettering herself.' The small table was laid with precision, and the room was bright and cheerful. It looked out upon the plaisance, and Leonard delighted in it, for in the bookshelves was a store of good French literature, which Monsieur d'Angère was always pleased to help him to appreciate.

The dogs took their places near their master and mistress, but not for greed, as they were not allowed to be fed during meals. Nevertheless, they watched them with a patient endurance, which Monsieur

d'Angère was wont to call their 'daily ordeal.' But for his polite obedience to his wife's wishes, and a regard for an already well-worn carpet, he would probably have given them occasional tit-bits himself. As it was, when the meal was concluded, he was permitted to administer 'just one mouthful' to each, and Leonard, who knew the exact moment at which this was to be performed, always watched for it eagerly. He had so watched ever since he was a child, and never remembered any variation in the proceeding.

'Hein! Loulou first; because she is of the softer sex,' said monsieur, glancing at his wife, who smiled modestly; and Loulou, the pretty Blenheim, sat up and sniffed a little, to discover if it were meat or biscuit that her master placed on her nose. 'Now, shut your eyes. Wan, two, t'ree, four, deux, quatre, un,

cinq, six,' continued monsieur; and Loulou opened her eyes, and, with a shake of her ears and toss of her pretty head, cast off, and caught the prize. 'It matter not, if I say six in French or English, Loulou understands. Is it not intelligent, Léonard, mon ami?'

'Very. But look at Frou-Frou, monsieur,' replied Leonard.

Frou-Frou was dancing on his legs in artistic fashion, and making the tour of the table.

'Thou hast thy bonne bouche. Thou hast performed well,' cried monsieur, casting the biscuit to the ceiling, which was duly caught by Frou-Frou. 'Doux-Doux is madame's pupil,' he added. 'You remember his curious history?'

'Oh yes! It certainly was strange,' replied Leonard, hoping to avoid its repetition.

'I never shall forget it,' began Madame d'Angère. 'We were in London, on our return from Paris, and I saw a man with the loveliest and smallest of white poodles under his arm. We asked the price. It was five pounds, but it was sold. "Too much, Alphonse," I whispered, longing for the sweet creature. But the man followed us to our lodgings, and the next day brought another poodle, whiter and lovelier far. He said he would make a sacrifice, and we should have it a bargain at four pound ten, because I was—you remember, Alphonse?'

'But, yes, ma mie. Entre nous, Léonard, the man said, "because she was so pretty and so amiable." Ha, ha!' put in monsieur when madame hesitated and blushed. 'We like the compliment so much, that we purchase the lap-dog; and the man assure us we have a bar-

gain. We are in London a few days, and the dog he is so hungry that he grows quite fat—so fat, that we fear the apoplexy, because he pant and weeze. We are in despair lest we lose our four pounds and ten shillings, and we procure a dog-doctor. He come! examine the patient, and ask for a pair of scissors.'

'Imagine my feelings, Leonard,' interrupted Madame d'Angère, shuddering, as she covered her face.

'I do, Aunt Amicia. I have a hundred times,' said Leonard.

'It was indeed horrible!' continued Monsieur d'Angère. 'But the doctor had no feeling. He proceed to cut open the poor lap-dog, while my dear wife shriek, and hold his arms. "Vivisection," I cry; but crack goes Doux-Doux' skin; and he neither bark, nor—what you call it? Wine? In a moment, out jump a black

puppy, a quarter so big again as the white. And that is our Doux-Doux. I crêve with laughter, as I remember to see the soft, white fur upon the table, and Doux-Doux, the mongrel, as you call it, jumping about the apartment—ha, ha, ha!'

'He must have cost money enough to maintain a child,' remarked Leonard, reflectively, while Madame d'Angère put Doux-Doux through his facings.

His principal accomplishment consisted in jumping through a hoop held aloof by his mistress. Mongrel though he undoubtedly was, he was the most vivacious and intelligent of the canine favourites.

'A child!' echoed Monsieur d'Angère, pensively. 'I have sometimes said so to madame. But then we have no children. *Apropos* of them, who was the little angel that carried you off?'

Madame d'Angère interrupted Leonard's

reply by bending elegantly to some invisible female, and rising to leave the dinner-table. The gentlemen, old and young, rushed to open the door, but the elder reached it first. Madame passed out, followed by the dogs, and Leonard, to his infinite satisfaction, had a *tête-à-tête* with his friend. He replied to monsieur's previous question by relating Aveline's touching story. He was himself so much interested in the child and her mother that he had been imagining all sorts of impossibilities while the dogs were performing. He had even been suggesting to himself the cruel alternative of putting an end to Loulou, Frou-Frou, and Doux-Doux, and introducing Aveline in their place.

'The children are more numerous than the blackberries,' remarked Monsieur d'Angère, reflectively. 'This one will be

well brought up. Lilyvite is famous; so was Polly. When Lilyvite does "better herself," as did Polly, perhaps madame may select your little protégée.'

'She is only eight; she would have six years to remain at school,' returned Leonard, dejectedly.

'Hein! six years; they pass like six months in this delightful climate. Let us take our walk while madame takes her—siesta. Ma foi, you English, you do make the Sunday a day of *rest*. It is good. I no longer can bear our dimanche as a *jour de fête*. I honour the fourth commandment, and would desire to see both man and beast repose on the Sabbath Day.'

Before going out, Monsieur d'Angère peeped into the drawing-room, and had the pleasure of a wave of the hand from madame, already recumbent on the couch, surrounded by her dogs. They followed

him and Leonard to the old castle, and disported themselves variously; while the friends, strolling over the smooth turf that surmounts the deep ditch which surrounds the castle, discoursed of many things, but chiefly of the squire's will. Monsieur d'Angère was much astonished at the legacy left to his wife, and asked Leonard concerning the contents of the davenport, who told him that he was not yet in possession of that antiquated article. Monsieur was of opinion that Leonard would discover a fortune in some secret drawer; but the lad knew the late squire too well to expect it.

'If you find nothing, let us know, and I am sure my dear wife will let you share our legacy,' said the Frenchman. 'A tousand pound! It is so large a sum, we know not what to do with it. I say always, the money bring the care.'

'Thank you, monsieur. The squire advises me to fight my way to independence, and so I will,' replied Leonard, sturdily.

'He was a queer fowl—fish, I mean. He and I were friends till I marry my Amicia; then—whew! I see him no more. It is always the marriage that offend the relations. If Mees Lisle had not married the poor lieutenant and gone to India, she would perhaps have lived, and I should have no legacy, you no davenport, and poor little Lisle no manor.'

'Life seems composed of ifs,' reflected Leonard. 'If Charles I. had acted differently, he would not have been imprisoned in this castle, and, if Oliver Cromwell had been the hero Carlyle makes of him, the king would never have been beheaded.'

'Ah, my friend, if Napoleon . . . . but, bah! I dare not return to Fontainebleau and its memories. You have your castle

—in ruins—I have mine, still in vigour, but desolate. Every stone of each could tell its story. But of what good to moralize? That is for the young—the old know better. Let us extend our walk.'

They did so, through pleasant lanes and fields, bright in their first delicate greenery, and when they returned to the cottage they found Isabella Dallimore and her sister Quiz there. They had come ostensibly to see their aunt, but really to make inquiries concerning Leonard's adventure with Aveline. This led, naturally, to a discussion in which all joined, not excepting the parrot. In a country place, every new thing, whether it be in morals or dress, is welcome.

'I think it is a great shame to put a stranger in a school intended for natives, and I shall tell Uncle Churchhouse so,' said Isabella, indignantly.

'Lilyvite! Bring the tea,' shrieked the parrot.

'If you have only natives in your island, what would become of me?' asked Monsieur d'Angère.

'Pauvre Alphonse! Kiss! kiss! kiss!' cried Polly, which caused monsieur to perform many antics towards the cage.

'Are you very fond of that little girl, Leonard?' asked Quiz, half jealously.

'I am very sorry for her, Quiz, because she is so unhappy about her mother. I wish you would go and see her, and make friends with her.'

'Friends!' repeated Isabella. 'What will you ask next, Leonard? A beggar off the roads! Pray don't put such low notions into her head. Class is class. I thought you were a conservative.'

'That doesn't hinder one being a Christian,' replied Leonard, who seldom

met Isabella without being irritated into a dispute.

'I suppose I am as much of a Christian as you,' returned the girl, offended.

'Snob! Does your mother know you're out?' shrieked Polly.

'I wish you would teach that bird manners, Aunt Amicia,' said Isabella, shaking her fist at Polly, who at once began to flutter and scream, while her master held out his finger, and the offender hopped upon it.

'What would it cost to keep a second servant, Isabella? Another Blue School girl, for instance?' asked Madame d'Angère, protruding a pretty little velvet-slippered foot.

'I couldn't say, aunt. You know very well that those girls eat their heads off. At the rate that our maids

gormandize, I should think thirty pounds a year.'

'And Uncle Lisle's legacy, mon Alphonse? What will it add to our income?'

'Ah! ma mie, but I understand not your English regulations. My friend, the major, he tell me it is in what you call the Tree per Cents., and will bring us about thirty pounds a year, and the government, he have a slice, in his Income-tax. But we have it not at all for twelve months.'

'Ha me!' ejaculated Madame d'Angère, languidly. 'Loulou, Frou-Frou, and Doux-Doux sadly want a maid to themselves, for I hear Lilywhite grumbling and scolding while she washes them, and they do not like her.'

Hearing their names, the dogs jumped

up, and began to bark; whereupon the parrot also barked furiously, and the hubbub was increased by Quiz, who clapped her hands and danced with delight.

Leonard put his fingers into his ears, and said, sententiously, that 'Aunt Amicia might keep two little girls upon what she expended on her dogs;' Isabella cried, 'Shame, that such riot should be run on a Sunday.'

Madame d'Angère was the only one of Mr. Churchhouse's sisters-in-law that Leonard honoured by the title of aunt; but then she was also the only one who looked on him as in some sort a nephew, and who had requested him so to style her.

'The squire used to advise me to put my money in the Three per Cents.,' said Leonard, when the noise had subsided.

'He thought it the only safe investment, and I promised him to place my first savings there. He was very ironical, but I didn't mind.'

'My friend Lisle has the land, and he cannot put that in the Tree per Cents. How is the young héritier?' asked monsieur.

'In a fair way to be ruined—indulged in every whim,' replied the oracular Isabella.

'The only sons and the heirs always are. I was till the poverty taught me to know myself,' said monsieur.

'Pauvre Alphonse! malheureux Alphonse! kiss, kiss, kiss!' chuckled Polly, still perched on her master's finger.

'He must understand, uncle,' whispered Quiz, stealing up to the bird. 'Pretty Polly! scratchee pole, Polly!'

'Va-t-en coquine!' shrieked the parrot, who would not be cajoled into civility.

'He understand,' laughed monsieur, ruffling the feathers at will.

Tea was announced, and all the party, Polly inclusive, proceeded downstairs. The ceremonial of offering arms was repeated, and, when the host and hostess took the initiative, Leonard presented his to Isabella with mock gravity, and the words, 'Will the Countess Isabella de Fortibus do a humble knight the honour?'

'She would very much like to box his ears,' replied that damsel, pushing before him.

'Let me! let me!' cried Quiz, catching the offered arm. 'This is how auntie walks. Now, Loulou, don't tread on my train,' she added, holding up her frock daintily with the disengaged hand.

And so they went to tea, or, more properly, coffee, and made mirth out of every little incident, as young people will. After-

wards they all went to church, the ancient church of Carisbrooke, built, it is supposed, in Saxon days, before the Norman conquered the conquerors. Here Leonard's thoughts reverted, in spite of himself, to the poor little charity girl, who was, he felt sure, sobbing herself to sleep in the old school-house in Lugley Street; and here he promised to himself to befriend her if possible. He had much of the *preux chevalier* in his nature, and his mind was full of old poetry and romances, so that, had he lived in days of knighthood, he would have broken a lance for Aveline or any other lonely damsel. As it was, he could only pray that both he and she might be protected and guided by the Father of the fatherless. Prayer seemed easier to him that evening than it had been in the morning. The old church was so reposeful, and the associations so pathetic.

Seated on a hill at the top of the picturesque village, surrounded by a graveyard full of antiquated tombstones engraven with quaint epitaphs and backed by high trees, the old church of Carisbrooke is an interesting object to every lover of simplicity and antiquity. To Leonard it possessed the additional charm of being connected with the ancient castle, and he never tired of reading the records connected with both.

Not all the efforts of volatile Quiz could disturb his devotions, and when they left the church, and she seized his hand to walk with him alone, she accused him of not caring half so much for her as he did for the little charity girl.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OLD DAVENPORT.

THE squire's executors did, as Monsieur d'Angère suggested, allow the full twelve months to elapse before they wound up his affairs. They did not even transfer the old davenport from manor to vicarage until that set period had passed. Therefore, when Leonard came into possession of his legacy, he had left school, and had resolved to accept the clerkship in the National Provincial Bank, to which allusion has been already made. He did not like the prospect—few young men of talent do like to be tied to a desk all day, with

small chance of being let loose during a natural life—yet he was thankful to take what a divine Providence seemed to have placed in his way.

'I have been dependent all my life,' he argued. 'I shall at least be able to support myself; and if only I could repay aunt for her share in my bringing up, I should be thankful. Uncle has been a cheerful giver—but aunt!'

This notion of repayment of benefits is more or less inherent in us all, but was inconsistent with Leonard's generous nature. He accorded to his uncle unlimited love and gratitude, but he felt it difficult to do so much for his aunt. He did not yet understand that it is wisest to receive without returning, and to give without expecting. He therefore resolved that the first fruits of his income should be spent in a present for Mrs. Churchhouse.

'They have carried it upstairs, Leonard,' said Lucy, mysteriously, when the davenport had arrived during her cousin's absence. 'May I help you to examine its contents?'

'Impossible, Lucy. It is "private and confidential,"' replied Leonard, taking two steps at a time, as he hastened upstairs.

'I shall take care how I tell you my secrets again, and how I make you an invisible chain for your key,' pouted Lucy. And Leonard understood that the acquisition of property resulted in 'envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.'

Nevertheless, he locked his door, and pulled from some hiding-place about his waistcoat the precious keys, suspended to Lucy's chain. The davenport was an unwieldy article of furniture, and much worn; the leather on its desk was faded; the ornamental brass-work defaced or lost,

but it appeared to enjoy, if not exactly a green old age, at least a strong one.

Seating himself before it, he began to try the keys with a feeling of superstitious awe, mingled with expectation.

'Surely I shall find something to my advantage, as the advertisements say,' he muttered, as he turned the key of the desk, and opened the wide top. 'Confusion thrice confounded! The squire himself!' he added, pushing back his chair, and uplifting his hands.

The contents of this portion of the davenport were certainly confused. A mass of papers, all higgledy-piggledy, as the saying is, lay before its new owner—old letters and papers, apparently thrown in haphazard, and mostly yellow with age and dust. But Leonard was attracted from these to a sheet of foolscap paper which appeared on the inside of the lid

of the desk. This had been carefully sealed to the wood at the four corners, and was covered with large, bold, but trembling writing, which ran as follows:

'The contents of this davenport are for the eyes of Leonard Leigh alone. If he find that he can make wrong right, let him do so; if not, let him respect the memory of one too proud and reserved to be just. I, Worseley Lisle, scarcely remember what I have from time to time, and year after year, confided to the keeping of this silent friend; therefore I dare not burn these papers, as I fain would do, and have not the courage to examine them. Let Leonard Leigh look them through, but not publish them to the world, unless he can thereby benefit any individual named in them. I trust his honour."

Leonard read this paper over and over,

then looked ruefully at the discoloured and untidy mass before him. Taking the keys from the lock, he proceeded to open the drawers at the side of the davenport. There were four, and the same key unlocked them all. Their contents seemed similar to those of the desk, and thrust pêle-mêle into receptacles really too small to hold them. While contemplating these, his thoughts naturally reverted to him who had placed them there. Why had he left them thus, and wherefore had he chosen him—Leonard—to unravel the tangled mass? He had been fond of the squire, and believed the liking had been mutual; but, although it might be best that he should carve out his own fortune from the hard material of the world, he did not understand why his chisel was to find its way first through the strange mass of matter before him.

'It is romantic, at least,' ejaculated Leonard, contemplating his legacy. 'Still I wish the squire had confided all this to the lawyer. How am I to wade through these papers? Yet I will do it, and see if I can "make wrong right." That would be something to live for beyond the N. P. B. There is the dinner-bell,' he added, and hastily closed and locked both desk and drawers. 'I shall be sure of a lecture from aunt,' he continued, as he hastily brushed his hair, washed his hands, and made himself presentable.

'I wish you would be more punctual, Leonard,' greeted him from Mrs. Churchhouse, as he entered the dining-room.

'Remember his legacy, mother,' put in Lucy, sarcastically. 'He has been inspecting it.'

'And what did you find, Leonard?' inquired Mrs. Churchhouse.

'Nothing as yet, aunt,' he replied, in some confusion.

'Ah! there is a mystery,' broke in the offended Lucy.

'I hate mysteries,' said her mother, severely.

'Well, I have a straightforward piece of news for you all,' said Mr. Churchhouse, coming to the rescue. 'We have let the manor.'

At this announcement the exclamations and inquiries were general, and attention was entirely diverted from the davenport. The young ladies were in a flutter of delight at the prospect of neighbours, and the squire was forgotten for the moment by all but Leonard, who said he could not bear to think of strangers in the old place.

'Better full than empty; and if they are rich, as I hear they are, they may give to the poor,' said the vicar.

'I hope there will be young people, and that they will be accomplished, and bring us new ideas,' remarked Sophy, who was sentimental and ambitious. 'But it is provoking that all the old furniture may not be sold. I should have liked novelty.'

'New furniture would not suit the old carving and quaint architecture. I am glad it must remain,' said Leonard.

'For twenty years at least, until the boy comes of age. Then he may make ducks and drakes of it, as heirs generally do,' returned his uncle.

Many inquiries followed concerning the name, position, and general qualifications of the new tenant.

'His name is Moore, Mr. John Moore. Not promising, my poor Sophy? He is vouched for by Uncle Conquest, who is his particular friend, and who is actually

going to spare a whole day to come down from London to arrange matters : although he could not attend the funeral.'

'Uncle Conquest! How delightful!' exclaimed Lucy, clapping her hands.

'He will tell us something of the London world. I wish they would ask us to pay them a visit,' sighed Sophy.

These two girls had been educated at home, and had not yet been out of their native island. They, like their cousin Leonard, began to sigh for 'the world over the waters,' as Lucy called it.

Leonard sat up late that night, peering into the contents of his davenport. He was given to sit up late, which displeased his aunt. She was a thrifty housewife, and knew exactly how much candle each member of her family burnt in his or her bed-room : knew to an inch how much the maids ought to consume in theirs,

and was competent, therefore, to accuse any individual of her establishment of using too much midnight grease. Even her husband was not exempt from her inquisition.

Finding that Leonard was the most extravagant, she managed to furnish his candle-stick with a save-all, and to supply this save-all with ends of candle that should have sufficed to light him to his bed. He did not venture to remonstrate, but he contrived to circumvent. On the present occasion, as heretofore, when the actual candle had nearly burnt out, he dexterously supported its wick against the iron spike in the middle of the save-all, and supplied it with the grease that had fallen upon the candle-stick. When this was exhausted, he resorted to a horde of similar pieces of dry tallow, secreted in his washhand-stand drawer, and so kept

the wick moist and alight. Its flame was not brilliant, yet who shall say how many odes, essays, stories even, he had composed by it, or how many stiff books he had read and lessons learned? He considered his conscience clear, because he never exceeded his end of candle, and many a sly joke passed between him and his cousins concerning it.

'Exhausted, and still nothing but confusion!' he muttered, as he perceived that the wick was ill-supplied. 'What can it all mean?' he added, shutting the davenport with difficulty.

As it is his secret, we must not pry into it; but must leave him to undress hastily by the waning light, and subsequently to offer up his 'sacrifice of prayer and praise' in that darkness which is 'no darkness, but clear as the day,' to Him whom he desired to serve.

The next evening brought Mr. Conquest. He was a shrewd, clever lawyer, with an intelligent face and satirical manner. He had spent the best part of his life in hard work, and at fifty years of age found himself in good practice, but with iron-grey hair, wrinkled brow, and compressed lips. When he married, his wife's little fortune had been a help to him, and they had laughed at difficulties; now that he was better off, he grew crusty over slight impediments, and was not, perhaps, the most amiable of men. None the less he was a very pleasant companion and welcome guest, and his friends said that when he smiled there was something worth hearing underneath. This smile was the great charm of an otherwise inflexible countenance. It was unusually perceptible that evening, when, having been hospitably welcomed and fed, he seated himself by

the drawing-room fire, in the midst of the vicar's family.

'Mr. John Moore!' he said, slowly and reflectively, in reply to many inquiries. 'Yes; he is a rich man. He made his money in Australia, and has come home to spend it. He has a sickly wife, and is recommended to try the balmy breezes of the Isle of Beauty. Don't look so disappointed, girls. He has three sons—one a piece and one over. All grown up. And positively no daughters. No chance for you, Leonard. By the way, what are you going to do with yourself?'

As Mr. Conquest asked this question, he turned round and fixed two keen grey eyes on Leonard, who was, at the moment, thinking more of his davenport than of the future tenants of the manor.

'I—I—have a clerkship in the bank,' he replied.

'And we think him very fortunate to get employment so soon,' put in Mrs. Churchhouse.

'Hem!' coughed the lawyer, scanning Leonard's handsome face to his embarrassment. 'Do you like the prospect?'

'Not much,' replied Leonard, frankly. 'But I have no choice. Uncle and aunt,' he added, hesitating on the latter word—'have been very good to me, and kept me all these years. It is now time that I should maintain myself, and the bank is the first thing that offers.'

Then Mr. Conquest inquired concerning his studies and pursuits, and the vicar replied for him that they had hitherto been classical, literary, athletic, and that he had gained many prizes, and achieved some success in this varied curriculum.

'Hem!' drily ejaculated Mr. Conquest again, and returned to the subject of the Moores.

But when, subsequently, he was smoking his cigar in the vicar's study, he made more inquiries concerning Leonard. While the young man was nursing his grease over the unintelligible contents of the davenport, and mentally ejaculating, 'I wish I was a lawyer,' momentous issues were pending in which he was concerned. His uncle, who was not only fond, but proud of him, showed Mr. Conquest some of his literary productions, which were certainly above the average of a youth of his years.

'I believe he would make a fortune had he only a chance,' said the vicar, looking inquiringly at the lawyer as he ran over a MS. poem.

'Fortune!—by literature! My dear fellow, where have you lived? One in a thousand swims, the rest either flounder on in muddy waters, or sink altogether.

Better try law,' returned the other, nodding over the verses.

'How? There is no money,' said Mr. Churchhouse.

'That is unfortunate. But he writes a fine clear hand, which is far more useful than a poetical genius. We want a young fellow in the office who would give his time in return for his learning, salary *nil* or nominal at first, at least—great advantages. Were I to advertise, I should get a thousand applications by return. Do you think this would suit him? If so, let him pack up, and return with me.'

'With you?'

'Yes. Why not? I am going to stay a few days, if you will keep me, for I want a holiday. Besides——'

'I will speak to Leonard at once. He is sure not to be in bed,' exclaimed the excitable vicar, and, before Mr. Con-

quest could remonstrate, he had left the room. 'Leonard, let me in,' he whispered through the keyhole, when he reached his nephew's room.

The accompanying tap startled Leonard, and he went to the door, which was locked. Finding that it was his uncle, he turned the key gently and let him in. The important announcement was made instantly.

'This is providential! I was just wishing to be a lawyer,' cried Leonard. 'I will go, uncle. Once in London, I can write for the periodicals at odd hours, and it will be hard if I cannot keep myself.'

'And the bank?' suggested his uncle.

'And the davenport—I must take that. Do you think Urry could help me to hammer up a case for it?'

'How impetuous you are, Leonard!'—

the vicar was the more impetuous of the two. 'Where is the money to come from? We cannot article you, or maintain you for that much.'

'Look here, uncle,' said Leonard, mysteriously, locking the door, which he had for the moment forgotten, and taking up an old pocket-book that he had turned out of the davenport.

On examining its well-worn pockets only a few minutes before, he had discovered two ten-pound notes, yellow with age, yet *bonâ-fide* paper money. The vicar uplifted his hands.

'All that the davenport contains is honestly mine, uncle,' said Leonard. 'The squire little thought, when he left this pocket-book amongst his papers, that he would, after all, give me a start in life.'

'He will start you to town, at any rate,' returned the vicar. 'But his final eccen-

tricity has crippled us all, for I certainly had taken it for granted that your aunt would have a share in the property, and that, by hook or by crook, we should have helped you on. But, my dear boy, all is in higher hands, and I pray that our Father may direct you on this momentous occasion of, so to say, beginning life in earnest.'

'It seems to me, uncle,' replied Leonard, humbly, 'that He has opened this path for me. I never liked the prospect of being tied to a bank for the remainder of my days, and there must be a chance of success in London.'

'Of course there is, my dear nephew. With your natural abilities, you must achieve something. Let us go down and talk it over with Conquest,' concluded the vicar, who, like the rest of the deluded country population, believed that

all who went to the metropolis for fame or fortune must be Dick Whittingtons of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER X.

LES ADIEUX.

'A YOUTH of eighteen keep body and soul together by writing for the periodicals!' exclaimed Mr. Conquest, when he, Mr. Churchhouse, and Leonard were discussing matters. 'Why, this island must be in the South Sea, and the hamlet of Lisle the centre of it. Surely you know enough of the world as it is, to be aware that established authors and journalists can barely live by their profession. Even lawyers, who were formerly fabled to rule the world, have hard work to exist.'

'You thrive upon semi-starvation, anyhow,' laughed the vicar. 'And as to your wife——'

'She gets too obese. She is doing Banting. I am alarmed about her. But for her, I could, perhaps, put up Leonard at our house till he sees his way; but we have both settled down into a domestic bliss so calm and even that the least innovation unsettles us.'

'That is the misfortune of having no children,' broke in the vicar.

'Misfortune! A merciful dispensation, on the contrary. At any rate, we *dispense* with them admirably. But, if Leonard didn't mind a shake-down in a closet, and his meals—well, anyhow—perhaps he could manage at my place in the Temple.'

'Oh, sir! I could manage anywhere—anyhow,' protested Leonard.

'We will see about it. Be ready to

go to town with me, and we will try to do something for you, if you do your duty by us. My brother will settle preliminaries.'

'I will do my best, sir. I am truly grateful,' stammered Leonard.

'I wouldn't advise you to be grateful till you find out what is expected of you. You may then be inclined to demand what you wouldn't receive—gratitude from us. Remember, you must stick to law. Leave literature behind you.'

Leonard's countenance fell. However, he was of a sanguine nature, and believed that all would come right for him; so he began at once to prepare for a journey to London. The whole house was soon astir, and even his aunt became gracious, now that there was a prospect of getting him off her hands; though she was continually wondering what her sister Con-

quest could possibly do with him. His cousins were divided between genuine regret at losing him, and jealousy of his good fortune at being the first to visit the metropolis.

'We hope to have you girls up some day, but your aunt's health won't allow it just now,' said Mr. Conquest, which caused Sophy and Lucy to chafe inwardly.

While Leonard was making his preparations and adieux, two subjects weighed heavily on his mind. These were his old davenport and the child Aveline.

When the former was encased, it made a heavy package, and he wondered what Mr. Conquest would think of it. And, as to the latter, he knew not how to perform his promise to her. He confided both these difficulties to his uncle, who advised him to leave the davenport behind him, and promised to look after the little girl

himself. But Leonard declared, almost in the words of Ruth, that where he went the davenport must go, which made his uncle laugh, and say that he supposed his nephew expected to discover more old pocket-books.

Before the journey to London, he went to bid good-bye to his friends. As Mr. Conquest considered it part of his duty to see all his wife's relations, Leonard drove him and his cousins to Newport. Having deposited his freight at Major Dallimore's, he put up his horse at 'The Bugle,' and proceeded on his tour of leave-takings. He could scarcely tell why, but his thoughts turned first to the child Aveline. He had visited her from time to time, but began to feel almost shy at so doing, owing to the amusement his chivalrous feelings towards her caused

his friends. On the present occasion he dreaded meeting her; still his feet turned towards the Blue School.

He had an interview, first with the mistress, afterwards with Aveline. The former told him that she hoped the child had become reconciled to her position. She was, she said, on the whole, a good, obedient little girl, but seemed always to be on the watch, as if about to escape from her companions. She was singularly quick at her lessons, and, when quite natural, was bright and lively; but she was given to steal away into corners with a book, and was not sociable with her schoolfellows. Although apparently innocent and open, it was difficult to understand her.

Leonard had heard all this before, and, when the mistress left the room, he pon-

dered over it. She soon returned, however, with the child, who threw herself impetuously into his arms.

'My dear, my dear, you should not,' remonstrated the mistress, as she left them together.

'I have been very good; I have done everything you told me. When shall I see my dear mamma?' she began, when he sat down and she stood by his side, her hand in his. 'I can make my bed, I can dust the room, I can clean my boots and mend my stockings, I can lay the cloth and keep my clothes tidy. I am going to learn to scrub and wash and cook. I have nearly knitted a stocking. I can hem and sew. Let me see, what else can I do?'

What a sweet face it was that gazed into Leonard's as this enumeration continued, and how quaint the child looked in

her little white cap, bibbed apron, and short frock!

'And the lessons, Aveline?' he asked.

'Oh! they are so easy,' she replied, with a little toss of her head. 'I learnt more difficult ones with my dear mamma. When will she come back?'

'You must be patient and work on. I feel sure we shall find her ultimately.'

The word 'ultimately' puzzled Aveline, and, when Leonard explained what it meant, she only said,

'Perhaps I shall then be so big that she will not know me. Will you not find her while I am little?'

'If I can possibly manage it, but—' returned Leonard, pausing and hesitating —'I am going away.'

Aveline rose with a cry of distress and threw her arms about his neck.

'If you go, I must go too. I cannot

stop here all by myself,' she sobbed, clinging to him.

'Then you will not find your mamma. She will probably come here in search of you, and, if you run away, she will not be able to find you.'

'Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?' sobbed the poor child, as if her heart would break.

'I mean to work very hard that I may be clever and support myself, and, perhaps, if you do the same, when she gets well, she may come and live with you, and you may be able to comfort her,' replied Leonard.

'How nice that would be. I will try,' she exclaimed, withdrawing her tear-stained face from his shoulder.

'And I will ask the Miss Dallimores to come and see you,' he put in.

'They came. I don't like them. The

youngest asked me many questions, and stared at me. But governess told me not to call her Quiz. Do you like her better than me? I do love you so very, very much.'

Had Leonard been vain, he would have been flattered that two youthful belles should be struggling for priority in his affections; as it was, he was annoyed, and replied hastily, and with the assumption of superior age and intelligence,

'I like you both very well, when you are sensible; but I shouldn't like either of you if you talked about me.'

Aveline shrunk back abashed, but she never forgot these words. He soon reassured her, by inquiring, as he always did, if she was happy. He received the usual reply that she should be happy if she could find her mother. Indeed, he knew that she was kindly treated. But

his tender heart could not bear the slow tears that coursed down her cheeks, and by way of comforting her he told her to ask the mistress to allow her sometimes to write to him. Her face brightened.

'That will be next best to your coming to see me,' she said.

He wanted to give her some trifling remembrance, in the hope that it would stay those silent tears, and he took a memorandum-book from his pocket, which had been given to him at Christmas, as it chanced, by Quiz. He bade her keep it for his sake, and be a 'very good little girl.' He might have been her father, or master, his words were so measured; but, as he rose to leave her, he was startled by the piteous cry that seemed to fill the room. It brought the mistress, who entered while she was clinging to Leonard.

'Oh! my dear! my dear! for shame,' said that excellent woman, taking her by the hand, while Leonard escaped, with unbidden tears in his own eyes.

His other leave-takings were tame compared with this. He hurried from house to house, from friend to friend. The old grammar-school, the vicarage, the abodes of lawyer and doctor, and many others, were rapidly visited. All their inmates rejoiced in his good fortune, and bade him God-speed. The bank clerks, who were to have been his co-workers, wished themselves in his place, and one said, 'If you come back this time fifty years you will find us all here;' and his former schoolmates thought it must be particularly jolly to go to London.

At the Dallimores he found Mr. Conquest and his cousins; but nobody, save Quiz, had much time to think of

him. All were occupied by the son and heir.

Twelve months of heirship had already made an autocrat of Lisle. He ruled the house, and, when Leonard entered, was the centre of a circle. He was, in fact, being exhibited for the benefit of Uncle Conquest, who, though he hated children, was expected to love this youthful prodigy. He made a great effort to do so, as in duty bound—for was he not brother to his London solicitor, who had helped to make him a ward of chancery, and to endow his parents and guardians with a comfortable income for his education and sustentation?

When we were first introduced to this 'marvellous boy,' he was content to suck his thumb and a lump of sugar seated on the hearthrug; now he footed it in the renovated drawing-room, a whip in

one hand, a sponge-cake in the other. He had all the appearance of 'A bloated Aristocrat;' for incessant feeding had swelled his cheeks, and much enlarged his small frame. Attired as he was in black-velvet and lace, from ornamented cap to shining skirt, he might have been a miniature King Hal, or a Beefeater in gorgeous array. A splendid new nurse, Chiverton by name, lorded it over the patient Ann; for, as heir of Lisle he needed two body-servants, and Chiverton was chief. She was, at the moment, waiting inside the door, to bear the youthful tyrant to his perambulator without the house.

'Go to Uncle Conquest, darling,' said Mrs. Dallimore, peering down upon him through her glasses, as she stood in trepidation at his back.

'He won't go to a stranger, my dear

Come to papa, like a man,' put in the major, holding out his hands.

'I think he feels inclined to make friends with me,' said Lucy, darting down upon him, as he evaded his father.

He began to roar, which distressed Lucy, and annoyed his nearer relatives.

'Better let Chiverton take him out. He will get no exercise before sleeping time,' said Isabella, decidedly.

'Pray do. Don't keep him in on any account,' remarked Mr. Conquest. 'A fine boy. A very fine boy. Will have to do Banting, though, if you don't take care, like his aunt.'

'A very healthy child,' returned Mrs. Dallimore, offended.

'Now, my precious, come to your Chivy,' breathed a silvery voice. 'Come and see the geegees.'

Lisle stayed his roar, to look in the

direction of the voice, which caused the maid to advance, seize upon him, and carry him off.

When this little scene was over, Leonard said he had come to take leave, and had yet to see Monsieur and Madame d'Angère.

'I am sure I wish you well, Leonard,' said Mrs. Dallimore, who had been anything but a well-wisher during the squire's life. 'It is very good of Mr. Conquest to give you such a fine chance.'

'Very,' replied Leonard, glancing at that gentleman.

'*Fine* is not the word, Mrs. Dallimore,' interrupted Mr. Conquest. '*Hard* would be better. Hard work, and no pay; and to give more than he gets. That's the upshot of my kindness. An articled clerk without the articles.'

Leonard shook hands all round.

'Good-bye. I wish you well with all my heart. I declare! there's Lisle in the wake of the Blue School,' said Major Dallimore, looking out of the window.

Leonard was followed downstairs by the three Dallimore girls, and, when they reached the hall, they became confidential. Isabella declared that Leonard had the luck of the world to be going to live in London, and that she meant to ask Uncle Conquest downright to send her an invitation. Helen, who was domestic, thought that 'Home, sweet home,' was best; and Quiz declared her intention of writing a journal, and sending it weekly to him.

'Then you will know all about us,' she added. 'But I sha'n't mention your protégée, because I don't like her. You are *my* friend, not hers. A little Blue School girl, indeed! A poor tramp.'

'You can be no friend of mine if you say such unkind things,' returned Leonard, hotly. 'I thought you were much more generous-hearted.'

'But I like my friends all to myself,' she added, relentfully.

'All right. I hope you will none of you forget me,' said Leonard, one foot on the doorstep, and his hand in Isabella's, who grasped it with all the force of her nature.

'Be a good boy, and tell aunt to invite me,' she said, while Quiz began to cry. 'I wish I were you just going to see the world. But I mean to go to Girton by-and-by, and not vegetate here.'

'And I mean to marry a prince, and—no, I will have nobody but you, Leonard,' sobbed Quiz.

'I think you had better be content at home,' put in Helen, oracularly.

'Perhaps you are right, Helen,' sighed Leonard.

He had fancied that nobody cared much for him, and was surprised at the unexpected interest. As he lifted his cap and stepped out upon the pavement, the three girls pressed forward to see the last of him, Quiz kissing her hand as he hurried up the street.

He had a kind welcome at Fontainebleau Cottage, chorused by dogs and parrot. He could not stay long, he said; indeed, he was so excited that he could rest nowhere. But he delivered himself speedily of what weighed heaviest on his mind.

'Aunt Amicia,' he began, 'you seemed interested in the little Blue School girl whose mother is in an asylum. If ever you think kindly of me, as I hope you may sometimes, will you then turn your

thoughts to her, and look after her a little ?'

'That pretty little girl who ran after you ? We will ask her to come and have tea with Lilywhite,' replied madame.

'That will be something,' reflected Leonard.

'And we will introduce her to Jacquot and the dogs, mon ami ?' suggested monsieur.

'If you would be as kind to her as you have been to me, she might not feel so lonely,' said Leonard. 'Thank you both. I must go now.'

'Why hurry you, my friend ?' asked monsieur.

'I have some calls to make in the village, and to bid good-bye to the castle, and finally to fetch the carriage and pick up Mr. Conquest and my cousins, who are coming to see you first, and then be back

for late dinner,' replied Leonard, with hurried importance.

'We dine late in honour of the great lawyer, then. Sister will be put about,' said Madame d'Angère, whom nothing troubled.

The trio went together to the gate, and just then the Blue School passed, on their return from a walk to the castle. Aveline ran, unbidden and unpermitted, to Leonard's side. Her eyes were swollen with weeping, but joy shone in them at seeing him once more. The mistress followed, distressed at this escape, and whispered to him,

'She has done nothing but cry ever since you left her.'

'This is the little girl, Aunt Amicia. Her name is Aveline Roone,' said Leonard, leading the child to Madame d'Angère,

who was standing inside the gate, surrounded by her dogs.

These spoilt animals had been barking furiously at the Blue School, under cover of their mistress's petticoats, but no sooner did Aveline uplift her pretty, tearful, trustful face to that lady's than the trio jumped upon her in friendly fashion.

'What marvel!—what miracle! Love at first sight. It is a little angel!' exclaimed monsieur, bending over Aveline, while she impulsively stooped to caress the discriminating quadrupeds.

'I beg your pardon for intruding, Madame d'Angère,' said the mistress across the hedge, 'but Mr. Leonard has been so good to the child that she doesn't understand her place.'

'Let her come and have tea with your old pupil, Lilywhite,' returned madame, 'the very next holiday.'

'Then you can play with the leetle dawgs,' added monsieur.

Aveline looked from one to another, then turned her beseeching eyes on Leonard. In another moment the mistress took possession of her, and she was lost to view in the pretty, picturesque procession that walked down the hill. The trio she left watched her drooping little figure till she was out of sight, and saw that she looked back from time to time.

'Behold the forlorn leetle one. Let us adopt her, my Amicia,' said monsieur.

'Oh, I wish you would!' cried Leonard.

'You will write to us regularly,' suggested madame. 'Then I will tell you the news in return. You are so interested in the dogs, and the villagers, and everything. It will amuse you when you are in London.'

'Thank you, Aunt Amicia. Of course I shall write. Good-bye.'

Madame put up her cheeks to be kissed, French fashion. She was such a devoted wife that she followed her husband's example in most things. Happily her Alphonse was blameless as one of her canine favourites, so she could not well do better; only her little weakness, if weakness it was—let married folk decide—was a subject of amusement to her affectionate friends, who did not fail to laugh over the oddities of the pair. Leonard was an exception. Although they diverted him greatly, they were too kind to him to admit of his joining others in mirth at their expense.

'I will accompany you to the castle and village,' said monsieur, and the friends were soon on their favourite eminence.

Here Leonard bade adieu to the green

terraces, the ruined walls, the ivied keep, the battlemented circumference. He even went inside to look his last for some years on King Charles's window, beneath which he had often poetized, and to pat the memorable donkey, for ever treading the wheel, not of fortune, but of fame; for was he not as much celebrated as many another aspirant after sublunary honours?

'I must see the bucket drawn up once more,' he said, giving the showman a few pence.

'He is deep,' mused monsieur, glancing down the world-famed well of Carisbrooke Castle. 'If thou dost sound the well of learning, my friend, so industriously as does that bucket, and if thou canst draw up the water of literature so surely as he does, thou must succeed.'

'It is the donkey does it, not the bucket,' replied Leonard, watching the

patient and obedient animal walk into the big wheel and turn it step by step like a treadmill till the bucket re-appeared full of the pure element taken from its source, 'full fathom five' below.

'It is all the same,' rejoined the philosophic Frenchman. 'Persevering donkeys often win when race-horses fail. Plod you along, Léonard, mon ami. Be not in a hurry. As we say, "Tout vient a qui peut attendre." The ass, he vaits and gets his biscuit or his grass when he comes out of de veel—pardon, I forget my double-vs ven I am interested—the scholar, he vaits and receives the prize. Is it a crown of parsley? What difference? The animal is fed, the man is not. Ma foi, I teach the languages twenty year, and am fed. Ca suffit.'

'You are not encouraging, monsieur,' said Leonard, trying to smile, as he patted

the donkey and presented him with his expected prize. 'I will hope to tread the wheel of fortune as successfully as this, my laborious friend, and who knows if I may not raise the bucket at last?'

So saying, Leonard bade farewell to the castle, and soon afterwards was on his way back to Lisle with his uncle and cousins.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAMBERS.

'HE is a very nice young fellow, and would make himself generally useful and agreeable,' said Mr. Conquest to his wife the morning after his return to town from the island.

'Sister Churchhouse has had him long enough. I don't want him,' replied the better half. 'If you take him as clerk, I see no reason that I should be burdened with him.'

'That dressing-room with a bed in it would be big enough, and he wouldn't

mind how or where he got his meals,' pleaded the barrister.

'But Mr. Churchhouse would. He has his pride. Besides, I am too great an invalid. And how is he to come and go every day? It would cost a fortune,' argued his partner.

He was posed. He had not taken this into consideration.

The Conquests lived at Hampstead, and occupied a large and delightful house overlooking the heath. They had frequently changed their residence during their twenty years of married life, on account of the lady's health; but they believed themselves now settled, for even she acknowledged that there could be no finer or more invigorating air than that of Hampstead Heath. Their house was roomy enough to accommodate a large family, but, having no children of her own, Mrs.

Conquest would not understand that she ought to adopt other people's. She was not philanthropic, and even went so far as to declare that young people were a bore, and that her own nieces were only endurable at a distance. Yet to see her enormous frame and singularly good-humoured, handsome face, you would have thought her capable of opening her arms to the whole world. But she either was or fancied herself an invalid, and so wrapped the said arms closely round her maladies, as if they were her offspring; which, in matter of fact, they were. All the Lisles, from the squire downwards, had the reputation of selfishness, and this was acquired by circumstances: for the squire had been an only son, and had everything his own way, while his relatives had been obliged to keep up an appearance on straitened means, and bounded

their views by the horizon of their island.

Mr. Conquest was naturally liberal, but law and his wife had also narrowed his views. Still he sometimes did a good action by impulse, which he repented of when these, his advisers, represented to him its fallacy. Already he was beginning to be sorry that he had brought Leonard up to London. But here he was, and he must do something for and with him. He had left him at a private hotel the previous evening, not venturing to introduce him to his wife unannounced, and his preliminary observations at the breakfast-table had certainly not been propitious. Still he was not without hope that Leonard himself might soften the heart that lay encased in the centre of that huge circumference. He did not venture on remonstrance, however, but said, as he rose

from table, that he must think of some other plan.

'Pray do, darling,' said Mrs. Conquest, rising also.

Now the 'darling' was not hypocritical, for was not he half of herself, round which she enfolded the arms afore mentioned, while embracing her own peculiarities? She kissed him, took up his black bag and carried it after him to the hall door, kissed her hand to him as he ran down the drive, and watched him till he disappeared on the heath. This little ceremonial had taken place every morning, when he was at home, for over a score of years. Would it be possible for a husband to contradict so devoted a wife?

He had no such intention: but when, at the risk of a *stroke* of some sort, he reached his train barely in time, he settled himself to consider some other plan.

In spite of his adoring wife, he had never quite relinquished his bachelor habits. Having no drain on his purse in the way of children, he had seen no reason why he should do so. He had, therefore, never given up his chambers in the Temple, to which he had quite a sentimental attachment. He and his brother had offices as well, but he clung to these scenes of his youth, where, if the truth must be told, he still occasionally entertained a few choice friends, after the manner of his more juvenile years.

'I don't really want the bed-room. If I do, he must turn out,' he muttered, as he swung out of his train, caught a hansom, and reached the hotel where Leonard had slept—somewhere, he thought, very near the sky.

Leonard was waiting for him, according to orders, in the coffee-room.

'Haven't a minute to lose. An appointment at 10.30. Jump in. Shove up the box,' he said, as the astonished youth was about to make the customary morning greetings.

They were in the Temple in no time. A porter, quick of sight, followed them to Mr. Conquest's chambers, and volunteered to carry the box. Leonard was about to declare his own capacity for so doing, when he perceived that it was already shouldered. He had barely time to notice that, on either side of an arched doorway, certain names were painted in clear, black letters, when Mr. Conquest bade him follow him. Young as he was, the barrister seemed the more active of the twain. Up a broad, stone staircase, two steps at a time to the first landing. No pause there. Another, and another, and again another flight of stone steps, until he

stopped, breathless, before a door, on the stone framework of which was imprinted, 'Mr. Conquest,' in well-defined, black letters.

'Fortunate we didn't bring the davenport!' said that gentleman, leading the way into a small room. 'Make yourself at home here, Leonard, till I come back; which shall be as soon as possible. Stow away your goods; for this den is yours —for the present, at least. Smells awfully musty, though.'

So thought Leonard, as Mr. Conquest withdrew, and was almost immediately succeeded by the porter, who put down the box, and waited payment. He gave him a shilling, and asked him the name of the place to which he had so rapidly arrived.

'Dr. Johnson's Buildings, sir. And that's Hare's Court as you look out upon,'

replied the man, hurrying off, and leaving Leonard to his reflections, or rather to a survey of his scantily-furnished apartment, which was seldom used by Mr. Conquest.

'There is a place for the davenport,' thought Leonard, perceiving a vacant space near one of the windows. 'The room cannot have been occupied for a century,' he muttered, aloud, throwing up the sash.

What a pleasant surprise! In the centre of Hare's Court was an enormous old plane-tree, the topmost branches of which touched his window. Time-worn houses of stone and brick surrounded it, in which he at once imagined that all the celebrities of all the ages had from time to time resided. How quiet it was! No sound but the chirping of many sparrows in the big tree, and yet he was in the heart of London.

'With my davenport to write upon, what may I, too, not accomplish in this —garret? no, chamber, I suppose it may be called. But where am I to sleep?' he mused.

He turned from the window again to survey his apartment.

'The squire did me a good turn, after all, when he left me the davenport. But for the ten-pound notes, I could neither have paid breakfast nor porter—and, until I get it here, I shall have neither desk nor writing-table, apparently. I wonder how I am to live?'

It did not occur to him to question why Mr. Conquest had left him to his own devices; nor, in fact, did it occur to that gentleman to pay his modest bill. He had been too hurried to think of it. But to Leonard's mind a vision of 'Chatterton, the marvellous boy,' presented itself, and

he began his career by understanding that it would be easy for a friendless lad to starve in such a room as he then occupied.

But he had no intention of starving, and he was far from friendless; so he bestirred himself to unpack his portmanteau and arrange its contents. Some of his books he had secretly inserted in the case containing his davenport, and earnestly hoped they would arrive with that, his legacy.

He was startled by a knock at the door. He opened it, expecting Mr. Conquest, but was greeted instead by a little woman with a broom in one hand, a duster in the other. She wore a dirty cap, had her hair in curl-papers, and was, to Leonard's unaccustomed eyes, a very disreputable-looking person.

'Mr. Conquest told me to look in, sir, and see if there was anythink I could do

for you. I came as soon as I could,' she said, surveying Leonard with two keen little grey eyes, which, though sharp, were not unpleasant.

'Thank you; pray come in,' returned Leonard. 'I believe I am to live here, but I don't understand how.'

'You'll soon learn. Mr. Conquest told me to git you what was ushul, and to see that this room was turned into a bed-chamber, which ain't ushul, because Mr. Conquest lives at Hampstead. A bed, and a chist of drawers, and a washstand —that'll do. Crockery in the cupboard. Here's a dust, to be sure! Cupboard hasn't been opened for years.'

She unfastened a cupboard with some difficulty, in which Leonard saw a variety of articles well encased in a thick coating of dust.

'See to it,' she continued, 'when I've

leisure. The chamber shall be ready by bed-time—don't s'pose you'll want it before. Office and amusements occupies the day.'

'And my dinner?' questioned Leonard.

'The gentlemen mostly gets that out. They only breakfasts here. Some biles their own kettle, some doesn't. Then they has tea when they likes.'

'I will ask Mr. Conquest about it,' said Leonard, feeling that the sharp eyes were interrogative. 'May I inquire your name?'

'Pluckrose—Mrs. Pluckrose. That's my name.'

'It sounds quite countrified,' said Leonard.

'Do it? I was never in the country in my life. But I'm going a 'scurtion this autumn when term's over. My children gets country enough since the Temple

Gardens has been open of a evening, and the embankment and the Thames is just as good for 'em as the sea. But, between you and me, the law don't like it; for, my gracious! they do make a rookery of the place.'

With this, Mrs. Pluckrose vanished, and Leonard was again alone. He seated himself near the window and took out his purse. He had made a hole in one ten pounds before he left the vicarage, for he had given presents to the servants, and a dole to the poor. But Mr. Conquest had paid his fare to London, and his uncle had bade him let him know when his money was exhausted, so he contemplated what remained without great anxiety. Not that he intended to ask his uncle for money. Having faith, he had no fear, and left his future in the hands of Him who ruled it.

And this was London! A narrow room, an old court, and a large tree. He took out his pocket-book and began some verses on this theme. Rhyme was easy to him, and he soon threw off a long poem, laughing as he did so to think that his consolation in the country was still his comfort in town.

'Now I must cut it down,' he ejaculated, beginning to use the pruning-knife with a will—not to the big tree, but to his poem.

He was of the stuff that makes authors, for, while spouting his verses, he reduced them by one half. There was a sparrow's nest in the tree, which gave him an idea, and set him wondering whether an individual of the genus tree-sparrow could have joined the huge colony of Londoners. He found himself muttering: 'Better have stopped at home, birdies. And perhaps I,

who sing your fate, were best in the N. P. B.'

He stood gazing at the palm-tree, and watching the said 'birdies' as they hopped from branch to branch, or flew down to the court below to look for crumbs, or such mites as the Pluckroses of the enclosure chanced to drop from door or window.

He began to look upon himself as a sort of sparrow, dependent on others for the crumbs of life, and waxed melancholy as he remembered that he was an orphan, and, if not friendless, lonely. These thoughts recalled the child Aveline and their sad parting; and he remembered how much more desolate she and thousands were than he was.

'I must be brave and fight my battle well,' he mused. 'The old tell me life is very short. To me it seems long in

perspective; but I will strive not to burden it by useless complaints. Still I wish I had some one to work for besides self. "The poor ye have always with you." Well, I can, perhaps, aid them a little, and certainly I can be a help to my uncle and a comfort to Aveline. Everyone else belonging to me seems provided for. I will make my way, at least, to independence, come what may, and trust in God.'

While philosophising thus, there was a brisk knock at his door, and in came Mr. Conquest.

'Sorry I've been so long. Have you been out to see the Temple? Grandest sight in London.'

'No, sir. You told me to wait till you came back.'

'Has Pluckrose been? All right: she's a character, and only requires to be let alone.'

'I don't think I shall interfere with her, sir.'

They both laughed, and Mr. Conquest told Leonard to come with him and have something to eat. The young man followed, nothing loth, and they went to a restaurant, where he did honour to the good dinner his friend ordered for him.

'Keep up your strength and appetite: you'll need them in London. Now we'll go to the office,' said Mr. Conquest.

This was in Chancery Lane, and here presided Mr. Charles Conquest, a younger brother of the barrister, who was a solicitor. It is needless to say that the brothers played comfortably into one another's hands, and had a considerable practice, both at equity and at common law.

'This is my young friend, Leonard Leigh,

Charley,' said Mr. Conquest, when they reached the office, after threading the dark and dirty mazes of the lane, and mounting to the third story.

'Ah, to be sure. I remember,' ejaculated Mr. Charles Conquest, very slowly, while quietly completing a note he was writing.

As he did not raise his eyes, Leonard was able to remark upon him and the room in which he was located. The latter was dark, but large, and contained, besides the table at which he wrote, one or two high desks, with commensurately elevated office-stools before them; pigeon-holes for deeds, papers and parchments, red tape, and a vacant chair or two completed the furniture. To judge from the white head that bent over the table, the younger brother would have been the

elder; but, when Mr. Charles Conquest at last looked up, Leonard was surprised by a comparatively young face. It was singularly pale and thoughtful, and the blue eyes that met Leonard's were absent and melancholy. He was certainly not the typical lawyer, whatever that may be. He stretched out his hand absently, without rising, and said, 'How d'ye do? How did you leave your uncle and his family?' much as if he had been apostrophising a mummy. Leonard took the white, lank hand across the table, and, in his zealous youth and country breeding, shook it as much as it was possible to shake so limp a machine. Its owner suddenly gazed into the lad's face, and returned the grip of his hand.

'Thank you,' said Leonard, involuntarily; for it was the first friendly pressure he had felt since he left home.

'For what?' asked the absent lawyer.

'For what you are going to do for him, Charley,' laughed Mr. Conquest. 'You want a clerk, or pupil as maybe, and here he is. He writes a capital hand, and can express himself well in prose and verse; can spell, and knows Latin, etc., etc.—at least, so Churchhouse assures me.'

'What else?' asked Mr. Charles, gazing at a parchment.

'Answer for yourself, Leonard,' said Conquest the elder.

'I will do my best,' replied the lad, modestly.

'Then sit down, and I will find you something to do,' said the lawyer.

'Get upon your perch, Leonard,' said Mr. Conquest, pointing to the vacant desk and form. 'The young fellow who preceded you is rising in the world, and so will you.'

'I have risen already,' laughed Leonard, when he had climbed to the indicated height, and sat, tall and erect, on the office-stool.

'He'll do, Charley,' whispered Conquest senior to Conquest junior. 'But there's no money to article him; so you must give him a nominal salary for his bread and cheese, while I house him. His uncle will do the rest; and we shall see about the articles by-and-by.'

Nodding to Leonard, he left the office.

And thus Leonard Leigh began his forensic education. He was, to all intents and purposes, only a lawyer's clerk, and therefore not much better off than he would have been at home in the N. P. B., as he phrased it. But his uncle and his friends fancied that, being with the firm of Conquest, his fortune

was made. For were they not connections, and would they not push him on? While Mr. Charles Conquest, an absent and preoccupied man, soon forgot whether he was articled or not. In other words, he accepted him for what he was worth.

'If you will tell me what to do, sir, I will begin at once,' said Leonard, startling that gentleman from a deed he was perusing.

'Ah, to be sure. Just copy this,' was the reply.

'I am afraid I must beg you to put me in the way of work first, sir; and then I will give you as little trouble as possible,' said Leonard.

'Ah, to be sure. Here is foolscap paper—there are pens and ink—and this is a good specimen of the writing required,' said Mr. Charles Conquest, rising, and

standing by Leonard's desk. 'Let me see what sort of a hand you write. Ah! capital. Fine, bold, legible writing. But you'll have to curb its vigour. Nothing like law to keep, not only one's writing, but one's mind in check.'

'To cramp it, in short, sir,' said Leonard.

'Ah, to be sure. You understand what you have to do?'

'I think so,' responded Leonard, aloud, adding to himself, with an amused smile, 'To be cramped in body by sitting all day long on this tall stool at this high desk; to be cramped in mind by copying parchments; and to be cramped in writing by imitating this round and copper-plate hand. This is what I have to do. So be it. And this is what I left the island for, and came to be a unit in London's millions!'

With this sage conclusion, he took pen in hand, and vigorously began his work.

CHAPTER XII.

AVELINE'S HOLIDAY.

'AH! but shall she not drink tea with the dawgs, ma mie? They are already quite at home with her,' said Monsieur d'Angère to his wife.

'In the kitchen, mon Alphonse? They will not take a meal in the kitchen, for they do not like Lilywhite. I fear she ill-treats them behind our backs,' replied madame.

'Then shall the child not join us, so that they may also enjoy her society? Pauvre petite! she seems so friendless now that Leonard has departed.'

'Frou-Frou is quite excited, Alphonse. See how he jumps around her! and Loulou runs also. As to Doux-Doux, it is really extraordinary. He is quite out of his mind.'

Monsieur and Madame d'Angère were looking out of the dining-room window at Aveline and their three pets. The child had come at their invitation to spend a holiday afternoon with them, and she and the dogs were disporting themselves in the plaisance, to which they were allowed admittance during the hay-making. She seemed to forget her troubles in the excitement of the moment. Now she ran hither and thither surrounded by the dogs, anon she sat down upon the new-made hay, and let the excited animals jump about her, lick her face and hands, and bark to their heart's content. The gipsy bonnet

fell back upon her shoulder, the clean white apron was rumpled; even the blossom-white cap was in danger of being displaced. The woodland rang with her laughter, and she had not been so happy since the day when she made friends with Toby.

'Won't you catch it, that's all! There's a mess you've made of your apron,' sounded from Fontainebleau Cottage.

It was Lilywhite, who was looking out of the kitchen window in envious displeasure.

'Let her alone, Lilywhite. You shall iron out her apron before she leaves. See how fond the dogs are of her,' screamed Madame d'Angère from the open window, out of which she was gazing.

'I wish you may get it,' muttered Lilywhite, under her breath. 'A beggar's brat like her!'

'Shall we join them, Amicia?' asked monsieur. 'The grass is dry; your pretty foot will not wet itself.'

'But the wind will disarrange your hair, Alphonse, and I have made the most perfect curls!'

'Hein! my friend, there is no wind, and I will wear no hat.'

The pair went arm-in-arm through the little garden into the road, and thence immediately through an open gate into the plaisance, madame glancing furtively round during this short transit, to be sure that no one was near to see her bonnetless. They found Aveline smoothing her apron, and casting frightened glances towards the kitchen window, where Lily-white stood on the offensive.

'Have no fear, she shall not hurt you, ma petite belle,' said monsieur. 'Take my hand, and we will walk—is it not, my

friend? Hark to the birds! They warble like angels.'

Aveline took Monsieur d'Angère's offered hand, and the trio wandered round the tree-enclosed hay-field, followed by the dogs. They passed beneath the windows of the cottage, from one of which still looked the displeased Lilywhite. But no one else observed them, for the haymakers had gone to a neighbouring field, and this was quite shut in.

'We are fortunate in our plaisance,' said the Frenchman, for the thousandth time; 'is it not so, ma petite?'

'Oh, yes, sir, it is beautiful,' replied Aveline, dancing at his side. 'I wish my dear mamma were here.'

'She understand French, ma mie? The miracle! How know you the meaning of ma petite?' he asked.

'My dear mamma taught me,' replied

the child, a cloud instantly passing over the sweet face.

'How and when?' inquired monsieur.

'When my papa was at sea, and we lived together with Betsey. We read such pretty books, and I learnt to read and spell, and to say French lessons and play the piano. But, when my papa came back, he said my dear mamma was mad, and they took her away from me, and I had no more lessons, only Betsey, who could not read as well as I could.'

'Her dear mamma!' repeated Madame d'Angère. 'She shall have tea with us, Alphonse. We shall then see if she knows how to behave. She really seems above the common.'

Shortly after the child was seated, demure, but not shy, at the tea-table. She evidently 'knew how to behave,' and how to talk as well, for she not only answered

all the questions asked her, but put others in return. Monsieur was in a continued state of amazement. She was even more charming than his favourite Quiz, and better mannered. As to the dogs, they paid her almost as much attention as their mistress, which caused that lady to say,

'Have you been used to dogs that they are so fond of you?'

'No, ma'am; but I love them so that they love me,' she replied.

'I suppose you don't know how to wash them and comb their hair?'

'I never tried, but I should like to do that. Are they fond of it, ma'am?'

She laughed merrily.

'No, they don't like it at all. And Lilywhite hates washing them.' Madame's voice sank to a whisper. 'You shall wash them when you come again.'

Aveline clapped her hands, which caused the dogs to bark and monsieur to laugh.

'Oh, that would be nice!' she said.

Poor child! happy for a brief space once more. For the moment she forgot her mother, and her kind entertainers did not remind her of her. But she did not forget Leonard. She asked eagerly about him; but her new friends only knew that he had arrived in London, and that only third-hand.

'He has not found time to write to us,' said madame, offended.

'Nor to me,' added the child, dejected.

'Ha, ha! Monsieur Léonard, thou must write many letters,' laughed monsieur, and a loud cacchination came from Polly, who was in the garden.

Aveline started.

'It is the parrot! We will bring him

in,' cried Monsieur d'Angère, hurrying out and returning with the cage.

The bird was soon on his arm, and the child off her chair.

'Take care; she will bite you! She love not children,' said Monsieur d'Angère.

But Aveline's little hand was already fearlessly smoothing its unruffled feathers, and her sweet voice apostrophising it with:

'Pretty Polly. You are like my dear old Polly, that my papa brought me from ever, ever so far.'

'A marvel! a miracle. See, Amicia!' said monsieur, as the bird clucked and chuckled, and eyed Aveline with sly, uncertain glance.

Monsieur slipped a lump of sugar into her hand, which she transferred to Polly, and it was apparent that she had made another conquest. She stood, with her hand laid confidingly on monsieur's knee,

and her face close to the bird, when he suddenly screamed out, 'kiss! kiss!' and her rosy lips were offered to his sharp bill. Madame was frightened, but Aveline was fearless; and unconscious fearlessness will tame a lion. So Polly and the little girl made believe to kiss, after which they both laughed heartily.

'Can you clean a parrot's cage, child?' asked madame.

'Oh yes! My dear mamma and I used always to clean my Polly's, till we gave her away, because we could not take her about with us. Poor Polly!'

Tears sprang into the child's blue eyes.

'We must adopt her, ma mie. Let us adopt her,' said Monsieur d'Angère, in French, pressing his lips on her forehead.

'To wash the dogs, and clean the parrot, and run errands, and watch that I

am not disturbed when I sleep, and answer the door if Lilywhite is not neat, and—but she is too young, mon Alphonse,' soliloquized madame.

'I could do more than that, if only you would help me to find my dear mamma,' cried Aveline. 'I used to help Betsey to cook and make cakes; and I can pour out the tea. Mamma used to call me her "little woman" when I helped her. And we learn everything at school. To wash, and iron, and scrub, and make beds, and oh! such a lot besides.'

She quite danced at her manifold accomplishments, so that monsieur whispered to his wife that she was so *vive* that he felt sure she must be of French extraction.

'Let us adopt her, ma mie. We have no children of our own,' he added, under his voice.

'You forget our nieces and nephew, mon Alphonse,' replied madame, reproachfully.

'But they are already provided for, t'anks to de squire,' said Alphonse, who always failed in his th's when excited. 'Behold Mr. Churchhouse!' he added, letting go Aveline's hand, and hurrying towards the gate leading from the field to the road. Madame and Aveline followed, and they met the Vicar of Lisle in the porch.

'Ha! my little friend,' he exclaimed, on seeing Aveline. 'I must write to Leonard to-morrow, and I shall be able to tell him how his protégée is. I hear you are getting on very well at school.'

'And what does Leonard say for himself? He has not written to us,' remarked Madame d'Angère.

'He seems to have plenty to do al-

ready,' replied the vicar. 'The Conquests have taken him up, and he is sure to become a lawyer in time. A clerkship won't hurt him; and he is to have a small salary. Conquest says that he will see after him. He writes hopefully himself, and, as he has plenty of spirit, I think he is sure to get on. He sends kind messages to everyone, together with a promise to write when he has time.'

Aveline's eyes were fixed on the speaker. Her lips parted, as if to put a question, but she had not the courage. She would like to have asked where in the great city this, her friend, lived, so that she might write to him; but she dared not.

'You may take the dawgs for a leetle run in the plaisance, is it not, mon amie?' said monsieur, suddenly; and poor Aveline was not permitted to hear more of her protector.

When she had left the room, the conversation still fell on Leonard.

'I have just dispatched his unwieldy package. It was too heavy to go as luggage,' said his uncle. 'The squire's legacy to him promises to be more plague than profit. He says he can find space for it in the room which Conquest has kindly allotted to him, so I sent it off, amid the sneers of my womenkind, who consider us both mad. I am afraid the squire's bequests will not turn to such good account as they might had he made his nieces co-heiresses, eh, Amicia?'

'I am quite content, and so is Alphonse,' bridled up madame.

'Ma foi! but the heir! How they spoil him!' exclaimed monsieur. 'The difference in the children! The dawgs already fear him, and they make friends at

once with the little charity girl down there in the garden. See them, how they run! Hear them, how they bark!'

Mr. Churchhouse glanced from the tea-table, at which he was regaling himself, into the field. Aveline and the dogs were in high sport again.

'She is a sweet child. I wish we could find her mother,' he said.

'She will, probably, be in some asylum. I would like to do something for the leetle girl.'

'Lilywhite grumbles over her work,' remarked Madame d'Angère. 'We have now an increase of fortune, and think we might keep a little maid to help her. We have taken a fancy to that child, both Alphonse and myself, and perhaps she might live with us, and still attend school daily. She would take the pets off Lily-white's hands.'

'And they are very rough hands—ha, ha!' broke in monsieur.

'And when she is old enough might take Lilywhite's place, who already talks of the time when she can "better herself,"' continued madame.

'What a mind she has! How far she sees into the future!' exclaimed monsieur, seizing his wife's hand and kissing it, while she simpered approvingly.

Mr. Churchhouse looked from one to the other, amused.

'You want a sort of nurse-girl for Frou-Frou, Doux-Doux, and Loulou,' he suggested.

'That is it! And for the parroquet also,' replied monsieur.

'I scarcely see how it can be managed, since the child is elected a boarder in the Blue School,' said the good-natured vicar.

At this moment the church clock struck seven, and Aveline made her appearance.

'If you please, ma'am, it is time for me to go,' she said.

'Ring, mon Alphonse, and tell Lily-white to accompany her,' said madame.

'If you please, I know my way quite well, and I promised not to run off in search of my dear mamma. Indeed—indeed, I will keep my word. My dear mamma said I always did. But may I go alone?'

'You like not the Lilywhite, my child?'

'She shall come with me. I am going to pick up the carriage in the town,' put in Mr. Churchhouse; and in a few minutes he and Aveline were walking, hand in hand, down the new village.

'Where would you like to live best—at

the Blue School or Fontainebleau Cottage?' he asked.

She hesitated, as if fearing to give offence, but poured forth a volume of prattle when he repeated his question.

'If I cannot live with my dear mamma, I should like best to live at Fontainebleau Cottage, with the kind gentleman and lady, and the pretty dogs, and the parrot; but not with Lilywhite.'

'Why not with Lilywhite?'

'She makes me afraid.'

'You like Carisbrooke better than Newport. Why?'

'I love the trees and fields, and the old castle, and the dark ivy. I love to hear the wind which we cannot see, and watch the flowers which we cannot hear. I then think of God, who moves the wind and clothes the flowers, and feel sure that He will care for my dear mamma.'

'Who teaches you these things?'

'Oh! sir, they are all in the Bible, and, when my dear mamma was well, she taught me. And we learn and read it at school, and it makes me good when I wish to be naughty.'

'I hope you are happy at school. They are kind to you?'

'Oh! yes, everyone is kind, and I try to be happy—indeed I do; though the little girls tease me sometimes because I never learnt to play; but my dear mamma was too ill to play, and I had no one else.'

'Poor child!'

This involuntary ejaculation and a pressure of the small hand brought the ready tears to Aveline's eyes. They were checked, however, while waiting with her friend at the hotel door until the carriage was brought round, and by a lift in the said

conveyance to the school. Here Mr. Churchhouse called to a boy to hold his horse, while he accompanied her into the house, and had a brief interview with the mistress.

CHAPTER XIII.

FIVE YEARS.

WHAT a strange, restless, anxious, laborious life did Leonard Leigh lead in that quiet court in the Temple during the next five years of his life! Some might have called it monotonous, but to him it was heart-stirring. Yet the curse that fell on Adam descended to him, for 'in the sweat of his brow' he assuredly ate his daily bread. Yet to him it was not a curse, but a blessing. Of what the world calls pleasure he had none; of the life which most young men live in

great cities he knew little. When the office hours were over, he devoted the remainder of the day and part of the night to literature. Seated at the old davenport in the corner by the window, he was either unravelling its contents, or the mazy threads of unspun ideas that filled his own brain. By degrees the puzzled papers of the one were reduced to some sort of order, and the twisted skein of the other partially unwound. The perplexing intricacies of law, combined with these other webs, united to make the warp and woof of his being a very tangled fabric, and time, talent, and thought were necessarily spent on it.

Leisure he had none; a holiday he never took. Nevertheless, he saw much of life between Dr. Johnson's Buildings, Chancery Lane, and such places as Mr. Charles Conquest sent him to; for truly, as Heine

said, 'The pulse of the world beats in the mighty city of London.' And Leonard's pulses beat with it. They were hourly stirred by what he saw and learnt in the retired Temple, in the surging Strand, in the absorbing office. But for this, self might have usurped the throne of his heart. The ever-flowing tide of humanity that bound him on all sides reminded him that he was only one wave of this huge ocean, and, while he panted to rise high, he felt that he was only part of one vast whole.

Not that he shirked society; he made acquaintances and even friends, but he was too poor to entertain them, and too proud to be entertained. This poverty! what a clog, yet what a spur it is. To Leonard it was a goad that was always piercing him. But it ever impelled him in the same direction. His bent was litera-

ture. From magazine to magazine, from editor to editor, he went either in person or by letter with manuscripts innumerable. Happily he was not discouraged; indeed he was not without some encouragement. The great moguls that sit on their divans behind the editorial screen are sometimes appreciative, and grasp at an original idea, in the hope of finding some fresh tonic to improve the public digestion. And Leonard had, perhaps, as much originality as most of the hapless crew who wear out their own intellects in an endeavour to amuse or improve those of other people. Yet time passed —years even—before his labours bore fruit. But he began to reap when he least expected, and when he was nearly giving up in despair. He received a letter from a live editor, to the effect that, if Mr. Davenport could shorten the

article he had written by one half, the editor would be glad to use it.

'Davenport' was the signature he had chosen. Leonard was not proud, so he set to work to curtail the manuscript. None but an author can understand how this process upset his equilibrium. At first he found it impossible. How was he to make *multum in parvo* of pages he had written, as he thought, with the utmost brevity already? Why was one man to usurp dominion over another in this tyrannical fashion? He sat up half the night, revising, copying, dashing his pen irritably through his most eloquent sentences, until he felt sure that he had ruined his paper. Nothing but the consciousness of an empty purse, and a vision of his aunt, could have stirred up his courage to murder his work; at least, so he thought. But he did murder it, nevertheless, and

he had no reason to regret his wicked work; for he was actually rewarded for it by a printed proof thereof.

The proof, directed, 'Davenport, Esq.,' was brought to him by Mrs. Pluckrose. She had taken a fancy and a pity for the lonely young man, having, as she expressed it, 'her feelins, and children of her own,' and began to reason with him concerning the impropriety of having two names.

'A alias, or a alibi, is all very well for them swindlers, but don't do for the likes o' you, sir,' she said, severely.

'See, Mrs. Pluckrose!' he exclaimed, tearing through the envelope of his proof in much excitement. 'It is only a *nom de plume*. I have been writing for the Press; that is all. This is my signature. But you must keep my secret.'

She glanced over his shoulder, and

there, at the end of the printed matter, was certainly the name, 'Davenport.'

'Poor young gentleman! I pity you,' she exclaimed, with uplifted hands.

'Why, Mrs. Pluckrose? I am overjoyed.'

'Bless you! I've seen a-many just the same. The tears have often come into my eyes at sight of the joy of the young barristers at a bit o' printed paper like that. "Proof," they call it, and I says, says I, "The proof o' the pudding's in the eating." But, mind you, Mr. Leigh, little's the eating that comes from them sort o' things. 'Tis very well for the benchers and the old stagers o' lawyers, like Mr. Conquest, to send to the papers, but it don't do for the likes o' you. It have a'most broke my heart to see young fellers like you, sir, sit over their desks, similar-like to you at that

devonport as you're allays at, with their fingers through their 'air, and their foreheads a-wrinkled up before their time. Lor'! my dear, why you oughtn't to have a mark in yours, and I see a line already beginning between your eyebrows. We used to call it the widder's line; but I'm a widder, and I ain't got a sign of a crease.'

'Oh! Mrs. Pluckrose, that is the line of thought,' broke in Leonard.

'Better think o' something else. Better hire yourself out as a sandwich-man, sir. Why, I've been here as laundress for a-many years, a'most afore you was born—but not so long as that—and I've had to see to scores o' young authors like you, and watched 'em grow into skelingtons upon that very sort o' food. Take my word for it, nothink don't come of it. Briefs is bad enough, but articles is worse.'

With which ominous sentiment Pluckrose left the room.

'That is just what the editor of *The Nation* said. "All the barristers write. We get cartloads of MSS. from them every month." Still one must live, and I have made a beginning.'

With which soliloquy Leonard locked his precious proof into his davenport and hurried off to his office.

The Messrs. Conquest either ignored or forgot that he had no money, or else they not unjustly considered that, having taken him for nothing as parcel clerk, parcel articled pupil, and having provided him with a lodging gratis and a 'nominal salary,' his other friends might do the rest. The absent-minded Mr. Charles appeared to take him for granted as a pupil, and found him of much use; for Leonard was not going to receive benefits without

making all the return in his power, and, therefore, worked with a will.

In the hurry of the hour it was not surprising if his legal friend were well content with this, and avoided further inquiries. He was occasionally invited to Hampstead, where Mrs. Conquest received him civilly; but she, like her sister Churchhouse and the rest, owed the poor fellow a grudge for being dependent on the male portion of their families.

'It is hard,' the sisters thought and said, 'that he should not be able to support himself. He ought to have accepted the clerkship in the National Provincial. But he *has* such an opinion of himself.'

It would be difficult to describe the delight with which, after a hard day's work both in and out of the office, Leonard returned to a frugal tea and his davenport, or how he read and re-read,

corrected and re-corrected, those printed thoughts of his, so soon to be given to the public. Yet he had never before felt so humble. Were they worthy of publication, after all? and what was he, that he should thrust his notions upon the world? However, forth they went, and he yet had to wait several months before they actually appeared. But he still wrote on, and always as 'Davenport.'

A cheque for three pounds was the first announcement that he was actually in print. He rushed out to purchase the popular magazine that had accepted him, and read over his article with delight. He was compelled to confess that it was not much injured, after all, by curtailment. He wanted sympathy. He must tell some one, yet he would preserve his anonymity. He stumbled upon Pluckrose, and showed her the magazine and the signature. She

looked at him and it with astonishment, saying,

'Bless me! Your eyes are as bright as two stars. Who'd a-thought that a bit o' printed paper could make you look so handsome. And I said you was just folloring of the other young man into the Skelington Army. How much money may you have made by your venture, if I may make so bold?'

Leonard's eyes fell beneath her sharp little orbs, and he replied, with hesitation, that, as it was a first effort, he had only made two or three pounds or so.

'You've a-been a long time a-getting it,' she remarked, reflectively. 'Three or four months, I shouldn't wonder. It wouldn't be a shilling a day. Now, a sandwich-man earns one and tuppence, and I get a deal more, or I couldn't keep my five children. Take my advice, Mr.

Leigh, stick to law. 'Tis a deal more profitable.'

'You are not encouraging, Mrs. Pluckrose,' laughed Leonard.

'I knows something of life, and that none but mice can live on mannyscripts, as they call 'em. Parchments is more durable,' answered Pluckrose; and went off with her broom.

'They are all alike,' mused Leonard, and he betook himself to the Temple Gardens, where he mixed with the dirty, uproarious urchins who made at eve a rookery of that sacred spot. He watched them pour in through the iron gates as soon as they were opened, and thought what a boon for the youngsters, if not for the benchers, was this admission from six to nine. Surely the gardens had never been used before, since how few, com-

paratively, of the denizens of the Temple ever entered them. Now bare-footed children lugged in bare-legged babies; street Arabs made somersaults on the grass; hundreds of juvenile voices united in a Babel of sound, and it seemed as if the learned retreat of the big-wigs of centuries had suddenly become a pandemonium of youthful criminals.

'Here are studies of human nature,' mused Leonard, as he discoursed with one and another of the miscellaneous throng. 'One needn't go far from the Temple and the Law Courts to learn something of the great miseries of the world.'

And, by a sudden transition of thought, Aveline stood before him in the person of a blue-eyed little girl, who was one of a small group that had gathered round

him. A pang of reproach came with this memory, for he had not written to her for many a day. In the turmoil of life, he had no time for letters, and he seldom wrote to anyone but his uncle. Even Quiz's voluminous diaries remained unanswered.

He was suddenly joined by a young man of whom he knew something, and to whom he had been introduced by Mr. Conquest, senior, as the son of the new tenant of Lisle Manor, Mr. Moore. He was studying for the Bar, and had many interests in common with Leonard. Whenever they met, they were sure to talk about Lisle and its inhabitants, of whom Stephen Moore knew almost more than Leonard of late. It was, moreover, evident that his heart was there, and Lucy Churchhouse had secured it; for, what-

ever the topic started, it was almost sure to revert to her.

As Mr. Conquest had suggested, the Moores made a pleasant new element at the manor.

'I suppose you will come down this autumn?' said Stephen Moore, as the two young men sauntered round the garden. 'What a row those youngsters make! One can't hear one's own voice. Miss Lucy says you haven't been in the country for four or five years. I'm sure you work hard enough to deserve a holiday.'

'I must work harder before I can afford to take one,' replied Leonard. 'Besides, I am not particularly wanted by anyone. They can all do without me.'

There was a pause, for it was impossible to deny the fact that the world of Lisle moved on much as usual, whether

Leonard were in it or not. Still he longed to be there again, and never tired of talking of the familiar scenes and people.

'I have just been reading a clever political article in *The Nation* by a new writer who signs himself "Davenport,"' said Moore. 'It is rather go-ahead, but I like it. Have you seen it?'

Leonard started and coloured. Not only to be in print, but to be appreciated was more than he could have expected in these days of cursory reading and half-fledged criticism. He muttered some sort of affirmative in reply, and repressed with difficulty a desire to shake hands with Moore, and make another confidant.

'You are not well, Leigh. You turn red and pale in a second. You really must take a holiday,' said Moore.

'I will think about it,' replied Leonard,

with a mental resolve that he would stick to London and literature now that he had pushed a little bit of one foot into the groove of success.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEETING BY THE WATERS.

HOW we long, sometimes, to sketch or photograph a passing scene, which, if not caught at the moment, is lost to sight if not to memory. So thought Leonard Leigh, when, after all those years of absence, he found himself once more in the neighbourhood of Carisbrooke Castle. He was on his way to Fontainebleau Villa, having made a short walking tour from the vicarage, through some of his favourite haunts. He had to cross a rustic bridge near the spot where the river

Medina has its source, and where he had often fished in his boyhood. There, in the centre of the bridge, stood a girlish figure, leaning on the rail and gazing into the water. There was nothing remarkable in the broad straw hat or simple summer dress, but there was an elegance and lightness in the figure that seemed to lend a peculiar grace to a scene in itself almost perfect. The streams that would, at no great distance, form the river, rippled and sparkled through the meadows, as if coquetting with one another before uniting in the brook that flowed beneath the bridge; while golden king-cups and emerald sedges waved in and around the happy water. How peaceful was the scene, how fresh the air, how intensely blue the sky! Leonard paused in the lane beyond to gaze upon this lovely landscape. While he did so, the figure moved, and suddenly stood

erect, with an open book before her. She remained a few seconds in this attitude, then glanced forth again, and uttered a little call.

Leonard moved forward, wondering if this were some old acquaintance, and perceived that two dogs were disporting themselves in the grass, and running in and out of the little creeks that bordered the streamlets, jumping and barking with canine delight. He hastened towards the bridge just as a clear young voice exclaimed, 'Now, dogs, we must go home,' and reached it as the speaker attained the opposite bank of the stream. He paused a moment in the centre of the bridge to watch the dogs jump upon the young girl, and to hear her exclaim, 'Down, Frou-Frou! Get off, Doux-Doux!' and then strode forward and stood amongst them.

'Can it be Aveline?' he exclaimed.

The girl started, uttered a little cry, opened her arms, and would have rushed into his had they been similarly extended. But he held out both hands instead, which, however, were not taken. She retreated and covered her face with hers, as if for shame. Her slight form quivered with emotion, the book fell to the ground, and the sympathetic dogs looked up at the veiled face, whined, and laid their damp little paws on the clean pink dress.

'Aveline, let me look at you,' said Leonard, approaching and gently touching her.

A young face, radiant with the light of innocence and flushed with the sudden delight of the unexpected meeting, turned upon him. He retreated a pace beneath the liquid lustre of the blue eyes. Could this be the child he had left? Could this opal of varying light be Aveline?

A sudden smile shot through the dewy eyes like a sunbeam, the dimples he remembered parted the red lips and showed the 'gates of pearl;' two little hands were clasped ecstatically, and a voice, rippling between laughter and tears like the variable brook at his feet, spoke at last.

'Oh! Mr. Leonard, you have come back. I am glad. You have been so long away that I feared you would never, never return.'

'I have been hard at work, Aveline. To me the years that have passed since we parted seem short to look back upon; but when I see you so grown—so changed—I feel that they have been long. It is all like a bewildering dream. Yet you knew me, Aveline? I should not have recognised you but for the dogs.'

'No, I could never, never have forgotten you,' said Aveline.

'Come and sit down upon this bank and tell me everything.'

'I must not. Madame will be expecting us.'

'I am going to Fontainebleau Cottage, and will make your excuses. We will walk together.'

Nothing loth, Aveline seated herself by Leonard's side upon the grass beneath the bushes of gorse, fern, and hawthorn, while the waters whispered and the bulrushes nodded, as if understanding their sweet discourse.

'You have not written to me for very long, Aveline,' Leonard began. 'I know I have not deserved it, but I have had no time to answer letters of late.'

'Monsieur thought I had better not,' replied Aveline, ingenuously. 'Lilywhite told Miss Quiz that I was always writing to you, and madame was annoyed, and I

think they all considered me to be doing something out of my position.'

'What *is* your position? I fail to understand.'

'So do I.' She laughed merrily. 'But dear monsieur and madame are very, very kind, and I try to do everything they ask me. When I went to them first, it was to take care of the pets and help Lilywhite in anything she wanted—and oh! she wanted so much—and to run messages for madame; and, in short, to make myself generally useful. I still went each day to the Blue School, only I lived at Fontainebleau Villa instead of there. Do you remember how I promised you to strive to learn all I could?'

'I do, I do,' said Leonard. 'But I miss one old friend. Where is Loulou?'

A shadow crossed over her sweet face as she replied, in a subdued voice,

'She is dead. That was very sad, and we were in great affliction. It was soon after I went to them; and some one accused me of causing her death. I do not even now know who it was; but I was about to run away, when madame said the mystery was cleared, and I had nothing to do with it. Afterwards, there was much talk of another dog in Loulou's place. Poor madame was in despair; and all her friends brought puppies of every sort, but she fancied none of them. One day I heard monsieur say to her, "Why not select Aveline? She is not so much trouble to educate as would be a new dawg;" and ever since I have had my meals in the dining-room.'

'And your education?' asked Leonard, as a delicious little laugh followed this intelligence.

'Dear monsieur had not considered that,

I think. But one day he caught me looking into one of his books, and he said, "Would you like to read that book? It is Racine, a famous poet." I said I should, and he began to teach me French. Now he likes me to read to him; and we have such lectures; and he explains to me the French and Latin authors, and we examine cyclopædias, and all sorts of books, until we are, as he says, "Masters of our subject."'

'All this in French?'

'Yes; but I read English to madame. And sometimes monsieur reads while we work. She has taught me French millinery, and I make all her caps and trim her bonnets. And sometimes she gives me a music lesson, and we all sing—French songs generally.'

'Strange!' ejaculated Leonard, looking at the bright, gleeful face of the young

girl. 'I suppose you are considered an adopted daughter?'

'Oh no! a companion, a mere child of the house, dogs' nurse, maid, gardener, but not a daughter. I am still my dear mamma's only child. Do you really think she is dead?'

Leonard was startled by the sudden change in the beaming face. The opal had turned to crystal. As if by a touch of frost, the colour left the cheeks, and the eyes filled with glittering tears that did not fall.

'I have been asking my uncle for all particulars,' returned Leonard, gently. 'It seems uncertain still, though I fear probable, that she may have wandered away from Parkhurst—and—and—fallen into the river. This is what I am told.'

'But how could they tell so long afterwards?' asked Aveline, shivering all over.

'It was not long after I came to Fontainebleau Cottage that monsieur—oh, I shall never, never forget!—told me that it was thought my poor mother was dead. They had found her among the sandbeds in the river—at least, they thought it was my dear mamma. But no one could have known but myself, and I did not see her. I thought I should have died; and but for monsieur, who never left me alone, I should have followed her to the kind, cold water. Can these cheerful little streams grow into so cruel a river?'

'Perhaps death was tenderer than life to her you have lost,' reasoned Leonard. 'The troubled spirit, released from the body, is free as air. She is now at rest.'

'I try to think so. Yet I pray always for her return. Thank you, oh! thank you for writing so kindly about her.'

'I did not cease writing to different

asylums until my uncle told me by letter this sad news.'

'And then you wrote to me. I have your letter still. But I feared you had forgotten me, and was very, very unhappy. Still I tried to believe in your promise to be my friend, because we are both orphans.'

The tears that had seemed frozen into Aveline's eyes melted and rolled slowly down her cheeks. Truly her young life had been bereft of hope when a corpse was found in the river, believed to be that of her hapless mother. Recognised it could scarcely be; but as all inquiries concerning her had been fruitless, and as no other female was known to have been missing, the authorities of the great House of Industry satisfied themselves that the body was that of the poor mad woman who had escaped from their charge. And so Aveline was indeed an orphan.

'Are Monsieur and Madame d'Angère as original as ever?' asked Leonard, seeking to turn the current of her thoughts.

'Original!' she repeated, slowly. 'You mean, unlike anyone else? Yes. He is an angel of kindness. She also, so long as she is pleased. When no one comes between us, we are happy as the day; but the Dallimores—' she paused.

'Are they not satisfied yet?'

'I am afraid they do not like me. Lisle is the only one of the family who is my friend, and he—all the world bows before him except monsieur and me, and they say we alone can manage him.'

'My cousin Lucy says he is the plague of the family.'

'You will see.'

A sparkle of mirth returned to the bright eyes and a smile to the mouth, as

Aveline rose hastily, suddenly remembering the flight of time.

'What will madame say? And what if Doux-Doux should take cold!' she exclaimed, her face half quizzical, half frightened.

'Time and the cold on my shoulders!' returned Leonard, gaily; and the young couple hastened up the lane, followed by the dogs.

Before they reached Fontainebleau Cottage, they were met by Monsieur d'Angère. He saw only Aveline at first.

'Where have you been, ma petite? Madame is in great embarrassment, for the dinner waits since half an hour, and Lilyvite she—— Ma foi, impossible! Léonard, mon ami!'

Monsieur d'Angère threw wide his arms, and then and there embraced Leonard. Leonard had not time to withdraw as he

had done from Aveline; the Frenchman was too impulsive. Like madame, he was 'embarrassed,' and did not, as he ought to have done, hug the portly, kindly man. The dogs came to the rescue, leaping and barking at the friendly greeting, while Aveline stood apart, undecided whether to laugh or cry, yet feeling that she and Leonard were scarcely orphans with so fatherly a friend.

'Hein! but thou art handsome, my friend Léonard, only too tall. What think you, ma petite? Stay you; I go to surprise madame. Hide you both behind the hedge. There she is in the porch. We come, ma mie, we come.'

Monsieur d'Angère hurried forward, while the others, obedient to orders, walked under shadow of the high privet-hedge. The dogs darted on to greet their mistress, who stood, elegantly attired,

shading her eyes with her much-beringed hand.

'Where is Aveline? She must dine alone or with Lilywhite if she keep the dinner waiting. You spoil her, mon Alphonse, as sister Dallimore assures me.'

'Not so, my friend. Behold how she has been delayed!' He threw open the gate, beckoned to Leonard, and impelled him forward into the gravelled path.

'It is all my fault, Aunt Amicia,' cried Leonard, while Madame d'Angère, startled by the appearance of a stranger, began at once to arrange her skirts.

'Ha! ha! she recognises him not! See, ma petite!' laughed monsieur, as Aveline peeped round the hedge.

'Excuse me! Pray introduce me, Alphonse.'

'Mr. Leonard Leigh—Madame d'Angère,' said monsieur.

She fluttered up to Leonard and repaid her husband for his little ruse by her pleasure at the meeting.

'Dinner waits. It is served. No time to arrange your toilettes,' she said, when the excitement was over. 'Come, mon ami. Follow us, Leonard and Aveline.'

Monsieur d'Angère pressed forward, offered his arm, and threw off his hat in the hall. The others did the same.

'You will take my arm, Aveline,' murmured Leonard, and the quartette went down the narrow staircase, followed by the dogs. 'Only Loulou missing,' he thought, and he remembered how Quiz had spread out and held up her skirts on a former occasion, in imitation of her aunt.

He looked down upon Aveline. Her face was flushed, and had a startled, half frightened expression. He learnt, after-

wards, that it was her duty to prepare the dessert and complete certain little elegancies connected with the dinner arrangement, which she had forgotten in her sweet converse with him. Her neglect would give Lilywhite an advantage over her. He also discovered that when she left the Blue School it was to wait, not only on monsieur and madame, but on Lilywhite, and the latter was by far the most exacting of the three. Indeed, as Aveline rose in position and favour, Lilywhite grew even more and more tyrannical, and Aveline yielded, anxious to keep the peace.

As Leonard sat opposite to her, he could but think that he had never seen anyone so fair.

'Her face is a poem—a song without words,' he thought, as he watched its expression vary from moment to moment.

She was quite at home. There was neither servility nor presumption in her natural manner, nor effort in her naïve conversation. Yet she waited when waiting was necessary; attended to every want of her benefactors, prepared the little condiments for the dogs, and appeared, what she really was, the child of the house. Yet Leonard felt, instinctively, that something of slavery lay beneath the apparent freedom. But we are all slaves, he thought, either of custom or circumstances. He was certainly one himself.

When the dinner was over, she remained below stairs awhile, and he went to the drawing-room with his host and hostess. They spoke of her, and said they thought she would have died of grief when she heard of her mother's fate.

'But my Amicia consoled her,' put in monsieur. 'And she is now our sunbeam.

The brightest creature and the most spirituelle the world possesses.' Here a perceptible shade fell over madame's countenance. 'Except my dear woife,' he put in, bowing to her in the old way. 'You do not forget, Léonard, mon ami, that there is no one to compare with her in my estimation.'

The shadow passed off from madame's childish features, and was replaced by the pleased and innocent smile that Leonard remembered so well.

'It is pleasant to come back, and find you both unchanged,' he said. 'You are neither of you a day older than when I left; and you have been very good to Aveline, which must make you very happy. Your kindness alone has consoled her for the death of her poor mother; and but for you, madame, what would have become of her? I recall the happy days

I spent with you before I left the island, and Aveline has but replaced me. The orphan girl instead of the orphan boy.'

Leonard's words were as balm to Madame d'Angère, who was vain and jealous by nature, and who could not forget that she had once been admired as a belle, with a pretty figure, fair hair, and a good complexion.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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